

ODILON REDON, THE VISUAL POET OF EDGAR  
ALLAN POE : A STUDY OF THE LITHOGRAPHIC  
ALBUM 'A EDGAR POË'

Veronica L. Kessenich

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**Odilon Redon,**  
**The Visual Poet of Edgar Allan Poe:**  
A Study of the Lithographic album *A Edgar Poë*

Veronica L. Kessenich

Submitted for the Degree of MPhil in History of Art  
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## ABSTRACT

'Odilon Redon, The Visual Poet of Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Lithographic Album *A Edgar Poë*' argues that the album *A Edgar Poë*, published in 1882, fundamentally alters Redon's artistic career. The thesis advocates the importance of Poe's writing to Redon's development, contending that the lithographic album confirms nineteenth-century literary and artistic interest in Poe. The thesis maintains that, while Redon subsequently attempted to disassociate himself from the American writer, his art was recognized and admired for its Poe-esque visions.

Chapter One examines Edgar Allan Poe's influence on the nineteenth-century French artistic and literary avant-garde. The chapter argues that the artistic and spiritual resemblance between Poe and Redon facilitates the design the lithographic album *A Edgar Poë*, a work Redon uses to promote his own standing as an artist. Through examination of the original plates of the lithographic album *A Edgar Poë* at The Art Institute of Chicago, Chapter Two illustrates Poe's centrality to the evolution of Redon's art. Chapter Three argues for the importance of *A Edgar Poë* in Redon's oeuvre, contending that subsequent albums and commissions show the important role of literary art in Redon's artistic growth. The chapter demonstrates the significance of Redon's work to the Symbolist avant-garde of Brussels.

Utilizing André Mellerio's notes, essays, collected letters and writings in the Ryerson & Burnham Library at the Art Institute of Chicago, the thesis argues that the album *A Edgar Poë* represents a pivotal stage in Redon's career through its dedication to a literary artist and the unification of art and poetry. Contending that the album develops themes prevalent in the *noirs*, the thesis illustrates the artistic resemblance and relationship between Poe and Redon and emphasizes the crucial role of Poe's work in Redon's progression and acceptance as an artist.

## DECLARATIONS

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## Introduction AN ARTISTIC ASSOCIATION

Between ingenuity and the analytic ability there exists a difference far greater, indeed, than that between the fancy and the imagination, but of a character very strictly analogous. It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the *truly* imaginative never otherwise than analytic.

- Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"<sup>1</sup>

You don't make the art you want. The artist is from day to day the receptacle for his surroundings; he receives from outside sensations and he inevitably transforms them, inexorably and tenaciously, according to himself alone.

- Odilon Redon, *To Myself*<sup>2</sup>

Odilon Redon's strong aesthetic individualism appeared with his rejection of the French academic style.<sup>3</sup> Instead of drawing pure representations from the live human models or statues placed before him in the Academy, he embellished the figures by incorporating an assortment of fantastic additions. These images do not picture the objectified real world but, rather, his unrealistic and imaginative dream world. He fused the natural forms with his unnatural imaginings. Charles Baudelaire's "Correspondences" (1857) first introduced the concept of merging the real with the fantastic, which Redon later envisioned by visually unifying the corporeal with the illusory. "Correspondences" illustrates the presence of a dual world through Baudelaire's insistence of the universality of forms; he abandons precision in order to affect a mood of ambiguity and suggestion. In the poem, Baudelaire locates man in an environment where he can walk surrounded by

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<sup>1</sup> E.A. Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 143.

<sup>2</sup> O. Redon, *To Myself: Notes on Life, Art and Artists*, trans. M. Jacob and J.L. Wasserman, New York 1986, pp 18-9.

<sup>3</sup> In the fall of 1864, Redon moved to Paris to study under Jean Leon Gérôme, an artist who embraced Realism and rejected Romanticism. Gérôme's criticism of Redon's more imaginative works, executed on formal nude studies, led to Redon removing himself from Gérôme's studio around 1865.

the natural world and populated with decadent, dream-like images. Redon's early charcoal works, self-titled as the *noirs* [blacks], assert a strong sense of dualism not unlike Baudelaire's poem. His images propose the synthesis of art with poetry. In particular, Redon's album of six lithographs titled *A Edgar Poë* presupposes the later Symbolist concept that therein lies an association between the visual artistic world with the literary poetic world.

Redon, who was forty-two the year he created his second lithographic album, *A Edgar Poë* [To Edgar Poe] (1882), went almost unnoticed in a century of progressive art. However, the album's publication marks a definitive turning point for his career; he began receiving critical and artistic recognition. The lithographic album's series of six compositions, including an introductory image,<sup>4</sup> illustrates a variety of relationships. In particular, *A Edgar Poë* affirms the importance of Poe's prose and poetry to Redon's art while, also, suggesting the nineteenth-century visual and literary interest in the album's dedicatee, the American author Edgar Allan Poe. *A Edgar Poë* allowed Redon to promote his art; he manipulated a few *noirs* in order to associate his old art with new, poe-esque visions. The publication of the album offered Redon the opportunity to broaden his themes via lithography. Subsequently, Redon sought to disassociate himself from Poe's writings in order to liberate his art from literature. Yet, it is Redon's interest in literature that promoted his art to the French and Belgium literary avant-garde while, also, establishing him as one of the forerunners to Symbolism.

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'introductory image' is a term I use throughout my analysis of the album *A Edgar Poë* due to the fact that its placement within the album is uncertain. When viewing the images at the Art Institute of Chicago's archives, the 'introductory image' was the final image as opposed to the fact that it is the frontispiece in O. Redon, *The Graphic Works of Odilon Redon*, intro. A. Werner, New York 1969.



Chapter One, in an attempt to understand the creative environment surrounding the lithographic album *A Edgar Poë*, contextualizes Poe and Redon in *fin-de-siècle* France. The chapter establishes the reputation of Poe's poetry and prose in nineteenth-century French literature by emphasizing the avant-garde's interest in the themes prevalent in his writings. Poe's primary (but, not only) introduction in nineteenth-century French literature is due to Charles Baudelaire. His reverent, methodical translations of Poe's main works were compiled into three different volumes: *Histoires extraordinaires* (1856), *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (1857) and *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses* (1865). Poe, believed to be a dark genius amongst some in the French literary circle, gained general acceptance due to his perverse and extraordinary stories. The critical treatment of Poe's work in America differs from the French. While some American critics scrutinized Poe's poetry and prose calling it rudimentary and full of plagiarism,<sup>5</sup> the French saw Poe as re-establishing the prominence of the short story (particularly the detective story). Poe provided his readers with an elegant, although admittedly bizarre, escapist literary world made from macabre and grotesque imagery. His stories emerge out of the cover of darkness set amongst vivid, flamboyantly decorated settings and populated by the most degenerate and perverse characters. The chapter also sets up the argument regarding the contentious artistic and spiritual relationship between Poe and Redon, a relationship grounded in criticism and discourse contemporaneous with Redon. Finally, Chapter One illustrates why Redon would seek to disassociate himself (and his art) from Poe.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1845, Poe began the "Longfellow War" (January - August) in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* against Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Poe accused Longfellow of plagiarism, an accusation that Poe himself faced numerous times throughout his career. For historical context surrounding the "Longfellow War" see W. Bittner, *Poe: A Biography*, London, 1962, pp 204-213. For actual articles Poe wrote regarding the "Longfellow War" see E.A. Poe, *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, New York, 1984, pp 670-777.

Chapter One establishes the artistic resemblance and relationship between Poe and Redon. Armand Clavaud, a friend and botanist of Redon's, first introduced him to the works of Poe by gifting him Baudelaire's translations.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the publication of *A Edgar Poë*, Redon's *noirs* exemplify his interest in designing images with Poe-esque imagery. In particular, the lithographic album's introductory image illustrates both Baudelaire's notes on Poe and Redon's own interpretations of Poe. The Poe and Redon artistic relationship resulted from the critical belief that both artists followed a similar creative process by making imaginary work with a highly analytical style. Both Redon and Poe adhered to a certain logic which assisted their melancholic imaginative creations. However, following the publication of *A Edgar Poë*, Redon criticized the Poe – Redon relationship. He disassociated himself and his artwork from the American author. Chapter One concludes with a discussion concerning Redon's detachment from Poe, his fraternal spirit. It suggests that his denial of Poe's influence and his attempts to redefine his art reject the assertion that Redon was the Poe of the visual arts.

Chapter Two focuses on the six individual plates composing the album, *A Edgar Poë*. The chapter analyzes Redon's arrangement of bizarre forms and his use of chiaroscuro thereby granting each image dimension, shape, and depth. Every composition synthesizes actual forms taken from nature with imaginative hybrids from both nature and the imagination. Most importantly, the chapter serves to orient each independent image in relation to a specific story of Poe's. At no other point in Redon's career or criticism is this attempted, and it is the intention of this chapter to show that every image responds to either a specific scene or an evoked mood present in the work of Edgar Allan Poe. The

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<sup>6</sup> Redon states in *To Myself* that "[Clavaud] made me read Edgar Poe and Baudelaire ... at the very hour of their publishing". Redon, *To Myself*, p 15.

album contains six autonomous images that utilize specific forms, which are recurrent iconographic motifs of Redon's art, to unite the non-sequential plates. Understanding the series of images as a unit is not fundamental to comprehend *A Edgar Poë*. Indeed, Redon intended to juxtapose a variety of composite forms in order to mystify. Under each image, he placed contrived captions as artistic versifications, which even Stéphane Mallarmé envied: "et, vous le savez, Redon, je jalouse vos légendes" ["and, you know it, Redon, I am jealous of your legends"].<sup>7</sup> Redon poeticized his visions as a way of adding further confusion to the perplexing images. However, the captions worked against his best intentions to bewilder as critics mistook them to be excerpts taken from the work of Poe. Each caption complicates the meaning of the entire album, as well as, the individual compositions. They were understood to be the titles to each independent plate. The study of each image, and the album as a whole, pays particular attention to re-occurring forms (such as eyes, the five senses, severed heads, and abstract geometric shapes). Chapter Two examines the development of Redon's visual iconography, arguing that *A Edgar Poë* sees him creating new motifs that explore themes relevant to his earlier designs.

Chapter Three supplements the analysis of the individual images that compile *A Edgar Poë* as it discusses the album as a whole and its placement within Redon's oeuvre. While he never verbalized his appreciation for Poe, as opposed to the numerous instances where he dismissed the author altogether, Redon visualized his admiration for Poe in the graphic works that directly reflect Poe's stories and themes. The chapter analyzes three charcoal drawings based on particular stories of Poe's that Redon completed following the

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<sup>7</sup> Mallarmé quote taken from exhibition catalogue (original source of quote not given) for the Loan Exhibition of French Art: Odilon Redon, April 3<sup>rd</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1922 at The French Institute of the United States, Museum of French Art, New York. Contained in the André Mellerio papers, (1895-1925, 1867-

publication of *A Edgar Poë*. These drawings suggest that Redon's interest in the American author disputes his assertions to the contrary. They also show his fascination with making perverse and macabre images. In fact, Redon utilized Poe's fame as a way of promoting his own art; the artwork made after Poe's dark imagery brought patrons and commissions. In particular, French and Belgium Symbolists (particularly from the Belgian Symbolist group, *Les Vingt* [*The Twenty*]) advocated on behalf of Redon and his art by commissioning covers and frontispieces for their books, manifestos, and journals. The ideas of Symbolist theorists such as Gustave Kahn and Maurice Denis, men who appropriated Redon's work as exemplary of their ideals, are broached.

Many of the six compositions of *A Edgar Poë*, along with subsequent images made after the album, suggest Arthur Rimbaud's idea that man is of a dual nature. He stated that man's sole responsibility in the world is to participate as well as document his experiences. Similarly, Baudelaire theorized the concept of *dédoublement* possibly the result of his noticing behavioral inconsistencies in Poe's *doppelgänger* character, William Wilson. Redon's images often reflect the duplicity of man, in particular, that the Janus-like characters perceive a heightened sensitivity of reality existent in the imaginary world. Critics like J.-K. Huysmans and Emile Hennequin play upon the duplicitous nature of Redon's work. They assert that Redon and Poe had a similar temperament, thereby reiterating the association between Redon's art and Poe's literature which, in effect, promulgates the duality of man. Redon's later rejection of Poe was an attempt to distance himself and his art from literature; it also served as a way of moving beyond the dark, black and white images of *A Edgar Poë*.

Chapter Three locates *A Edgar Poë* alongside his previous album, *Dans le Rêve* (1879), and before a few of his following albums such as *Homage à Goya* (1885), *Le Juré* (1887), and *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1888). The chapter addresses Redon's visual literary art by looking at his commission to design a frontispiece for Emile Hennequin's *Contes Grotesques* (1882). During the execution of *A Edgar Poë*, between the years 1879-1890, Redon's art evolved. He created works that probe the psychology of his mind in the effort of overcoming and understanding his melancholic disposition. With the year 1890, Redon began to diversify his artwork by substituting his black and white works for colour (executed in either pastel or oil). The addition of colour to his works imbued his art with a newfound spiritualism; the hues overcome the dark psycho-spiritualism of Poe. Redon often added the brilliant colours to an existing *noir* to transcend the works with a sense of mystic redemption compared with the otherwise perverse and macabre black pieces. By the time of the colour works, Redon had established himself in the arts as both a visual and literary artist.

Of particular importance to this thesis is the accumulated documentation on Redon's life and art as collected by André Mellerio, a friend and biographer to the artist. These letters, newspaper clippings, transcriptions and various other writings were the primary source to this thesis. Redon spent much of his life proclaiming that his art was independent from literature, and he even went so far as to say that "Art borrows nothing from philosophy and has no other source than the soul in the midst of the world".<sup>8</sup> Due to his statements, many of the primary (as well as secondary) sources surrounding Redon's life and art were a matter of perception and opinion. This is also true of Mellerio.

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<sup>8</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 93.



However, the André Mellerio papers in the Ryerson and Burnham Library at the Art Institute of Chicago seem to unfailingly document the various different interpretations of the artist in his environment. While Mellerio's own writings bend to the pressures and dictation Redon imposed upon him, the collected papers manage to glean from a variety of different sources the contemporary (and somewhat) unbiased view of Redon. Supplemental to the thesis is an assortment of secondary sources on Redon particularly Dario Gamboni's *La Plume et le Pinceau*, Richard Hobbs' *Odilon Redon*, Stephen Eisenman's *The Temptation of Saint Redon*, Sven Sandstrom's *Le Monde Imaginaire d'Odilon Redon*, and a variety of different collected publications by Ted Gott. Also fundamental to the thesis is Douglas Druick and Peter Kort Zegers recent Art Institute of Chicago exhibition catalog, *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams, 1840-1916*. The variety of these supplemental secondary sources serves to validate the critical perception that, while the album *A Edgar Poë* is an important one within the oeuvre of Redon, it is not understood as being fundamental to the development of his art. This one unifying factor is why the secondary sources are such a conclusive addition to the Mellerio papers, as well as to Redon's own written words and published letters. Contrary to the expert critics, it is the intention of this thesis to prove that *A Edgar Poë* is pivotal to the development of Redon's art as it serves as the primary example of him utilizing literature as a direct source of inspiration.

The following chapters attempt to avoid relegating Redon to what he hated most: a title. Each chapter argues that the lithographic album *A Edgar Poë* altered his artistic career. Its conception and execution exemplified Redon's desire to distribute his drawings to the public. His early *noirs* visualized his melancholic disposition while, the

album, composed of a series of iconographic images, illustrated his development as an artist. Its reception, primarily from Huysmans and Hennequin, critically recognized Redon's artistic interest in Poe's works. *A Edgar Poë* shows Redon's interpretations, albeit a broad interpretation, of the American author's tales concerning the perverse and grotesque. This thesis argues that the album confirms the nineteenth-century French visual and literary interest in Poe. In particular, it examines Redon's album as being a literary album whose images and captions defy definition and categorization. Redon states in his journal, *A soi-même* [*To Myself*] that "an artist is powerful when he has imitators".<sup>9</sup> His statement affirms his own imitation (and appropriation) of another artist in order to promote his own career. However, when critics labeled Redon as a literary artist, Redon's subsequent admissions that he disliked Poe resulted from his struggle for independent artistic appreciation. *A Edgar Poë* primarily introduced Redon and his art to the literary avant-garde in France and in Belgium. The adoption of his art, especially for the Belgian group *Les Vingt*, demonstrated how his artistic resemblance with Poe transformed. Redon's art seems to be the precursor to many Symbolist ideas due to the fact that his compositions synthesized art with literature. And, for the painter and theorist Maurice Denis, Redon is the founder of Symbolism.

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<sup>9</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 28.

## Chapter 1 THE POE-TIC REDON

... [Des Esseintes] paused more often in front of the other pictures that decorated the room. These were all signed Odilon Redon.

... They contained the most fantastic of visions ... drawings that plunged even deeper into the horrific realms of bad dreams and fevered visions ... [they] defied classification, most of them exceeding the bounds of pictorial art and creating a new type of fantasy born of sickness and delirium.<sup>1</sup>

Lithography, "even more than the photograph, was the first step in industrializing the arts, the beginning of the age of mechanical reproduction".<sup>2</sup>

Odilon Redon experimented with a variety of mediums, specializing in the manipulation in charcoal of black and whites that he titled the *noirs* [blacks].<sup>3</sup> These macabre pictorial expressions brought to life his imaginative visions thereby exposing himself and his art to bitter attacks and vigorous defenses. While making the *noirs*, Redon began using lithography as a way of distributing his graphic works to the public. He compiled the reproduced lithographic *noirs* as a series of plates bound together in album form. Lithography enabled him to reproduce his textural charcoals without losing too much of the greasy and tenuous qualities of the charcoal medium. In the beginning, he transferred his catalogue of *noirs* from paper to stone. He carefully selected the picture (and in particular, specific subtleties) that he wanted to duplicate. Lithography allowed the multiplied art to stand-alone. This graphic medium opened his art to a broader artistic circle, encouraging Redon's sophistication as an artist and liberating his drawings from

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<sup>1</sup> J.-K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. R. Baldick, London, first published 1959 p 73. *Against Nature* was first published as *À Rebours* 1884.

<sup>2</sup> T. J. Clark, *Artistic Relations: Literature and the Visual Arts in 19<sup>th</sup> century France*, P. Collier and R. Lethbridge (eds), New Haven and London 1994, p 17.

<sup>3</sup> The *noirs* originally were compositions executed in charcoal. However, as his art progressed Redon began making the *noirs* in a variety of mediums including charcoal, pencil and lithography. The *noirs* date from around 1867 to 1879 marking a psychological period in his life when he was overwrought with melancholy.



exclusivity. Like the *noirs*, which were intimate productions of his fantastic imagination, lithography encouraged the propagation of his visions without perverting their individuality.

Redon's execution and publication of lithographic albums (as well as singular images) gave the public the opportunity to own a signed, original work. He marketed his new art under the pretext that, while the lithographs are manufactured, the works remain pure because they are issued in a small series of editions usually twenty-five or fifty. As a way of securing particular artistic sponsors, Redon publicized his work by giving it away as gifts, "the distribution of free lithographs ... functioned virtually as promotional circulars".<sup>4</sup> He understood that his acceptance as a graphic artist depended on the critical reception of his works. Therefore, he presented his lithographs to numerous critics and writers often under the guise of friendship: "Self-promotion became the very essence of self-preservation".<sup>5</sup> One such recipient, who would become a great advocate of his work as well as a good friend, is the art critic and writer J.-K. Huysmans. And, in particular, Redon's album, *A Edgar Poë* [*To Edgar Poe*] (1882) [fig.1.1], established the tactics for cultivating art patrons. He explored self-promotive stratagems involving the annunciation of the album's title and theme: the work of Edgar Allan Poe. Redon utilized Poe's fame in order to promote his art.

Poe's death occurred in 1849, nine years after Redon was born. In 1882, thirty-three years later, Redon composed the album *A Edgar Poë*. He made a visual tribute to the American author. The album's title and poetic captions suggest his reverence and

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<sup>4</sup> T. Gott, "Silent Messengers: Odilon Redon's dedicated lithographs & the Politics of Gift-giving", *The Print Collectors Newsletter*, July 1988, p 92.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p 95.

admiration for Poe's literary works. After issuing *A Edgar Poë*, amidst a somewhat receptive audience, Redon's fame grew and his artistic career profited. Yet, numerous sentiments surround the album with regards to how it's publication prostituted his art, with it, he "perdu toute ... innocence" ["lost all ... innocence"].<sup>6</sup> This chapter examines Poe's début in nineteenth-century France; it looks at his introduction emphasizing the effect he had on Redon's art, particularly the album *A Edgar Poë*; and it discusses the non-relationship Redon emphatically enunciated with regard to Poe.

## France and Poe

They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those  
who dream only by night.

-Edgar Allan Poe, "Eleonora"<sup>7</sup>

The American poet and author, Edgar Allan Poe, wrote for various different literary publications from 1830 to his death in 1849. He specialized in prose for his magazine contributions, and punctuated his stories with his analytical style and sophisticated descriptions. However, from the very beginning, Poe saw himself as a poet. Before the year 1831, he compiled three small volumes of poetry: *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827), *Al Araaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems* (1829), and *Poems: Second Edition* (1830-31). Poe's continuous battle with melancholy and alcoholism influenced his out-put to a major degree. His work was often interrupted by his mood swings, which bounced between lethargic depression and sensational productivity.

<sup>6</sup> O. Redon, "Peyrelebadé, 21 Juillet 1898", addressed to André Mellerio, in Van Oest (ed.), *Lettres d'Odilon Redon*, Paris and Bruxelles 1923, p 31.

<sup>7</sup> E.A. Poe, "Eleonora", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 269.

Poe's early poetry reflects the pride and Romanticism of Byron. On the other hand, his later prose work contains the grotesque and bizarre elements fundamental to Gothic literature. His poetry and prose synthesize human spiritualism (horror and psychology) and pseudo-science (Astrology and Alchemy). His writings investigate the fads of spiritualism and occultism thriving in the early nineteenth-century. The work also reflects his mysterious persona. In many cases, he is present in them as the adventurer ("The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfall", 1834-35), the lover ("The Raven", 1845), the personification of melancholic madness ("The Fall of the House of Usher", 1839-40), the murderer ("The Tell-Tale Heart", 1843) and the detective ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue", 1841-42). He delighted his reader's thirst for the extraordinary. He offered them an escape into a different reality and, at the same time, he refined his perverse psychological explorations. Poe researched the physiology of the human mind paying special attention to the body's response to the mind's bidding. Psychology, in its early developmental stages, held particular fascination for him because it attempted to explain the inexplicable. Many of his writings resulted from his need to understand the human psyche, particularly his own. He does not inhibit himself or his prose rather, he links the material world with the imagination, utilizing his restive dreams:

... those wakeful moments which approximate dreams because the individual drifts off into a private world of his own making where the senses cease to bear on mundane reality and the reason ceases to criticize.<sup>8</sup>

Alert to the senses, his work gives the impression that he instinctively understands his own personality. But, the horrific truth alive in his writings resides in the fact that he illuminates the universal human psychology, "His world is [a] dark, dangerous world ... It

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<sup>8</sup> V. Buranelli, *Edgar Allan Poe*, Boston 1977, p 28.

is a dream world, but every man dreams".<sup>9</sup> Poe, "the writer of the nerves",<sup>10</sup> gave nineteenth-century France stories and poems that represented similar concepts elucidated by the literary and artistic French avant-garde. The themes present in Poe's stories "belong to the chaos of dreams and the unconscious life".<sup>11</sup> It is the "*technique* with which this material is rendered that [is] most extraordinary"<sup>12</sup> to the likes of Charles Baudelaire and J.-K. Huysmans.

Poe's impact on nineteenth-century French literature and art resulted from Charles Baudelaire's admiration of the American writer. He first discovered Poe in 1847 when he read several stories by Poe in *La Démocratie pacifique*, which were translated by Isabelle Meunier. The story that intrigued him most was Poe's "The Black Cat" (1843). The perverse story invigorated Baudelaire's need for a "symbolic case-history in which he was able to discern a psychological truth that echoed obscurely but imperiously in the depths of his own character".<sup>13</sup> In a letter written to Armand Fraisse, a scholar and critic, Baudelaire intuits that his reason for revering Poe is the opinion that the two men wrote similar literature:

In 1846 or 1847 I became acquainted with certain fragments by Edgar Poe. I felt a singular excitement. ...I found poems and stories which I had thought about, but in a confused, vague, disordered way, and which Poe had been able to treat perfectly.<sup>14</sup>

Baudelaire's belief that Poe wrote sentences that he had only internalized filled him "with delight and terror, [there are] not only subjects which I had dreamt, but whole phrases

<sup>9</sup> J. Porte, *The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James*, Middletown 1969, p 56.

<sup>10</sup> P.F. Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, Carbondale 1957, p 18.

<sup>11</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p 254. Italics are Huysmans emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>13</sup> Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, p 85.

<sup>14</sup> C. Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, III, 41, *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, ed. J. Crèpet, Paris, 1923-1953, 19 vols. in Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, p 70.

which I had thought, written by him twenty years ago".<sup>15</sup> He saw Poe as a kindred spirit and felt that there existed an uncanny resemblance of character. To Baudelaire, Poe had what appeared to be an almost French, bohemian nature. His marginal life and peripheral career differentiated him from the rest of the American writers. Poe exemplifies the degenerative genius in Baudelaire's eyes. For him, Poe embodied the most perverse musing current in the nineteenth-century especially "when [Poe] is denouncing it or else, with all his mechanical ingenuity, busily devising the means to transcend it".<sup>16</sup>

A passion or, perhaps, duty consumed Baudelaire: "Do you know why I translated Poe so patiently? Because he resembled me".<sup>17</sup> He noticed that both he and Poe had a keen interest in life. A similar hypersensitivity and awareness in the documentation and participation of the nineteenth-century consumed them both. What Baudelaire termed *dédoublement*, which literally means the doubling of the personality, he saw alive in Poe's character and in his writings (known to Poe as the *doppelgänger*). And, for seventeen years, Baudelaire translated Poe's poems and prose into three volumes: *Histoires extraordinaires* (1856), *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (1857) and *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses* (1865).<sup>18</sup> Poe obsessed him: "what seems to have seized [Baudelaire's] attention in Poe's tale is the fusion of the natural and the supernatural, the contrast between the scientifically accurate search and the dreamlike abundance of the treasure".<sup>19</sup> Baudelaire's respect (maybe even envy) rests in Poe's ability to have a

<sup>15</sup> E. Starkie, *Baudelaire*, London 1933, p 177.

<sup>16</sup> H. Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville*, Ohio 1980, p 104.

<sup>17</sup> L.B. Hyslop and F. Hyslop Jr., *Baudelaire: A Self-Portrait (Selected Letters Trans. and Ed. with a Running Commentary)*, New York and Toronto 1957, p 208.

<sup>18</sup> Baudelaire translated the *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* to be published in installments of *Le Moniteur universel* beginning February, 25 1857. He began translating Poe's *Eureka* in 1859. It was subsequently finished and published in 1864.

<sup>19</sup> R. Lloyd, *Baudelaire's Literary Criticism*, Cambridge 1981, p 53.

seemingly rational ‘correspondence’ between the metaphysical and the physical. Poe was, in many respects, the ‘un-American’ and bohemian genius because, while his works were imaginative, “his fantasies are strangely materialistic”.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the most developmental characteristic of Poe’s work for Baudelaire was the integration of the grotesque. Poe makes the ugly seem beautiful. Baudelaire utilized Poe’s elevation of the perverse and macabre in his own ground-breaking work of poetry, *Le Fleurs du Mal* (1857). This volume of poetry and prose poetry inaugurated Baudelaire’s artistic and literary career, which until then had primarily received public attention for the Poe translations, as well as, a variety of art criticisms.

The art critic and novelist J.-K. Huysmans was also influenced by the power of Poe’s horrific tales. *A Rebours* [*Against Nature*] (1884) incorporates the despondency of nineteenth-century France with miscellaneous psychological meditations present in Poe’s stories. In the Prologue, Huysmans establishes Des Esseintes’ family pedigree. He intimates at the similarities between the “degeneration of [Des Esseintes’] ancient house”<sup>21</sup> and Roderick Usher, a man who is “a portrait ... of the artistic temperament in its most decadent ... state”,<sup>22</sup> from Poe’s story “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839-1840). The association of ancestral decay alludes to the eventual collapse of Des Esseintes, both physically and mentally. In Chapter XIV, Huysmans pronounces his debt to Poe when Des Esseintes begins re-arranging his books in the library; he catalogues them by designating the importance of a writer’s “personality”.<sup>23</sup> Des Esseintes’ likes and dislikes intimately reflect (or project) his identity. Huysmans’ declares that the

<sup>20</sup> Levin, *The Power of Blackness*, p 104.

<sup>21</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p 17.

<sup>22</sup> Porte, *The Romance in America*, pp 60-61.

<sup>23</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p 180.



sophistication of Des Esseintes' taste results from his knowledge regarding his personal wants and desires. This reiterates Baudelaire's theory that the "essence of a writer's work [is] ... deeply rooted in the individual *tempérament*".<sup>24</sup> For Huysmans, the literary artist whose personality best resembles Des Esseintes is Poe, satisfying "the requirements of [his] mind".<sup>25</sup> Huysmans parallels Des Esseintes with Baudelaire and Poe, therefore supporting Baudelaire's own sentiments with respect to his artistic fellowship with the American author.

If Baudelaire had made out among the hieroglyphs of the soul the critical age of thought and feeling, it was Poe who, in the sphere of morbid psychology, had carried out the closest scrutiny of the will.<sup>26</sup>

Des Esseintes' identification with Baudelaire and Poe suggests that all three aesthetes have a similar *tempérament*.

Mostly, Des Esseintes' admires Poe's scrutiny of the will because it intimidates and awes him. He fears unearthing his own weak psychological disposition. Poe's mysterious tales, especially "The Imp of the Perverse", unnerve Des Esseintes because of the narrator's nightmarish investigation into the depths of human darkness. With Poe, pseudo-scientific analysis accounts for the main character's most petulant actions. Des Esseintes suggests that Poe first studied the "irresistible impulses which the will submits to without fully understanding them, and which cerebral pathology can now explain with a fair degree of certainty".<sup>27</sup> His characters exemplify universal humanity and, similar to Des Esseintes, they are susceptible to lethargy and depression. Poe's psychological writing describes the moment when a character implements his own self-destruction; the

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<sup>24</sup> Lloyd, *Baudelaire's Literary Criticism*, p 50. Italics are Baudelaire's emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p 190.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p 191.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p 191.

occasion when the “lethargy of the will”<sup>28</sup> precedes rational thought. His psycho-spiritual writing expresses “psychology rather than ethics”.<sup>29</sup> And for Des Esseintes, who cannot recognize the existence of morals, the most awesome feature of Poe’s writing concerns the fact that the mind is aware it has lost control. Its sadistic choices relegate the characters to damnation.

It was on this last subject, this lethargy of the will, that he had concentrated his studies, analysing the effects of this moral poison and indicating the symptoms of its progress—mental disturbances beginning with anxiety, developing into anguish, and finally culminating in a terror that stupefies the faculties of volition, yet without the intellect, however badly shaken it may be, giving way.<sup>30</sup>

Des Esseintes admits that he could fall “prey [to] his imagination” only *if* and *when* he strays away from rational thought and into the realm of perversity: “like the unfortunate Usher [he is overcome] by an unreasoning fear, an unspoken terror”.<sup>31</sup>

Poe’s subconscious probing creates monstrous men. His stories show how men (and some women) are condemned because of horrific psychological temptations. While no aspect of Poe’s style is what could be called typically French, literary artists like Baudelaire and Huysmans were mystified by Poe’s ability to rationalize decadent immoral behavior. Poe’s decorative and theatrical settings glamourized perditionous actions. He used science to authenticate his unscientific presumptions about the human condition, leading Huysmans’ Des Esseintes “gradually and by imperceptible degrees from the real to the extraordinary”.<sup>32</sup> Poe’s literary puzzles reflect Baudelaire and Huysmans most

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p 191.

<sup>29</sup> Buranelli, *Edgar Allan Poe*, p 73.

<sup>30</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p 191.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p 192.

<sup>32</sup> Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, p 59.



fantastic ordinary events. His ‘correspondence’ synthesizes the imaginative with the actual.

## Poe and Redon, A Relationship

What unifies Redon’s work and at the same time constitutes their chief inspiration is the impression of the beyond—the beyond that Edgar [Allan] Poe delighted in pursuing, attempting to define it lucidly, mathematically, even through the premonition he had of it.<sup>33</sup>

In *A Rebours*, Des Esseintes’ admiration for Poe’s stories is visualized by Redon: “whose terrifying or hallucinating effects Odilon Redon seemed to have transposed into a different art”.<sup>34</sup> Two years prior to Huysmans’ publication of *A Rebours*, Redon published the album of lithographs entitled *A Edgar Poë*. He may have altered the spelling of Poe’s name, from Poe to Poë, because of the sonorousness of the word ‘poe’: “it is possible that the sound of his name tended to make it a byword, and to make [Poe] an occupational hero, in France: *Poë, poète, poésie*”.<sup>35</sup> The album reprises a few early charcoal *noirs* while also giving Redon the chance to practice with the lithographic technique. With the seven images in total, one of which is an introductory composition like a frontispiece, while the six core compositions reflect Redon’s own imaginative musings regarding the metaphysical world of his *noirs*. They are the result of Redon’s impressions with respect to Poe’s stories and poems.

<sup>33</sup> A. Mellerio, “Odilon Redon”, (1894), in H. Dorra (ed.), *Symbolist Art Themes: A Critical Anthology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1994, pp 57-58.

<sup>34</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p 73.

<sup>35</sup> Levin, *The Power of Blackness*, p 103.

The work of Poe intrigued Redon while he was still associated with the circle of Madame de Rayssac.<sup>36</sup> The circle called Redon the prince of dreams because his *noirs* envision “the fantastic reaches of a boundless imagination”<sup>37</sup>. A friend from Rayssac’s circle, fellow artist Henri Fantin-Latour, introduced Redon to lithography.<sup>38</sup> Madame de Rayssac’s letter to Redon in 1879 tells of his interest in the American author. She thanks him for the gift of his first album *Dans le Rêve* (1879). Following her gratitude she asks him: “Celui que vous préparez sûr Edgar Poë sera-t-il dans mon livre? Sont-ce des gravures ou des lithographies?” [“The one that you prepare on Edgar Poe will it be in my book? Are they engravings or lithographs?”].<sup>39</sup> Like *Dans le Rêve*, Redon’s albums appealed to “print connoisseurs and bibliophiles, to be kept in drawers rather than framed, and to be ‘read’ through one by one, much like a volume of poetry”.<sup>40</sup> The literary and poetic nature of the album is emphasized by Redon’s placement of captions directly below the image on each board. However, the album *A Edgar Poë* “although bearing suggestive titles ... [is] unnumbered and [can] be arranged by the viewer in any order”.<sup>41</sup> Convention and, particularly, Alfred Werner’s *The Graphic Works of Odilon Redon*,<sup>42</sup> have determined the order with which *A Edgar Poë* has come to be arranged and viewed.

<sup>36</sup> Madame Berthe de Rayssac, the widow of the poet Saint-Cyr de Rayssac, patronized numerous artists as well as promoting the values of Romanticism. See D. Druick and P.K. Zegers, “Taking Wing, 1870-1878” in *Odilon Redon: prince of dreams 1840-1916*, exh. cat., The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago 1994, pp 89-90.

<sup>37</sup> O. Redon, *The Graphic Works of Odilon Redon*, intro. A. Werner, New York 1969, p XI.

<sup>38</sup> T. Gott, *The Enchanted Stone: The Graphic Worlds of Odilon Redon*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Victoria, Sydney 1990, p 22.

<sup>39</sup> B.E. de Rayssac, “II- Samedi 27 septembre 1879”, in A. Redon (ed.), *Lettres: de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren...à Odilon Redon*, Paris 1960, p 80.

<sup>40</sup> Gott, *The Enchanted Stone*, p 22.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p 22.

<sup>42</sup> Werner uses André Mellerio’s 1913 catalogue, as well as its 1923 supplement, in order to create a “standard source for the titles of the prints and the size of the editions”. Redon, *The Graphic Works of Odilon Redon*, p XV.

Redon intended with the publication of *A Edgar Poë* to promote his artistic career. He utilized Poe's fame in order to obtain a client-base for his art, merging his established iconographic motifs present in the *noirs* with the macabre subject matter available in Poe's texts. Redon does not follow Poe explicitly. Rather, the compositions of *A Edgar Poë* "are remarkably successful evocations of the stories that inspired them ... They do not explicitly refer to passages but, instead, in an epigrammatic way, summarize essential features and situations".<sup>43</sup> By the time of Baudelaire's death in 1867, Poe had already become a "great man in France".<sup>44</sup> Baudelaire characterized Poe as an ancestral figure that narrated the "great forgotten truth: the primal perversity of man".<sup>45</sup> His writings were not to be read as "mechanical melodramas, [but] as contrived exercises in the horror genre".<sup>46</sup> Redon's art follows Poe's synthetic and imaginatively real writings. His visionary, dream-like art brands him as "one of the phantasmic post-romantic producers of nightmares in the tradition of Poe".<sup>47</sup> Emile Hennequin, an art critic, suggests that Redon captures "the desolate realm where the real and the fantastic meet, which he has populated with awful phantoms, monsters, monads, composite beings displaying every human perversity, bestial ignobility, and [the power to terrify common to] all noxious things".<sup>48</sup> Hennequin's article, "Beaux-Arts: Odilon Redon" (March 4, 1882), critically analyzes Redon's 1881 exhibition<sup>49</sup> of graphic works consisting of bizarre compositions.

<sup>43</sup> F. Leeman, "Odilon Redon: The Image and the Text", in D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers (eds), *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams 1840-1916*, exh. cat., The Art Institute of Chicago 1994, p 183.

<sup>44</sup> Hyslop and Hyslop, *Baudelaire*, p 71.

<sup>45</sup> D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers, "In the Public Eye", in D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers (eds), *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams 1840-1916*, exh. cat., The Art Institute of Chicago 1994, p 137.

<sup>46</sup> Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, p 18.

<sup>47</sup> S. Sandström, "Odilon Redon: A Question of Symbols", *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, May-June 1975, p 30.

<sup>48</sup> Druick and Zegers, "In the Public Eye", p 137.

<sup>49</sup> The 1881 exhibition took place at the editorial offices of *La vie moderne*.

Hennequin also introduces Redon's 'new' album, *A Edgar Poë*. In the brief article, Hennequin does not give any details concerning the nature of the images contained in the album. Rather, his casual advertisement, "Redon informed me that he had published two sets of lithographic plates in very small editions, *To Edgar Poe* and *The Dream*",<sup>50</sup> announces the album. It also explicitly acknowledges his friendship with Redon.

The elegiac images of *A Edgar Poë* offer an extraordinary look into Redon's imagination. Like Poe, he is an artist who draws "unknown beauties, the strange, the creative" dreaming of a "new, rich and striking means of expression".<sup>51</sup> In "Confessions of an Artist"<sup>52</sup> Redon advocates that he makes suggestive art. His *noirs* and lithographs are the chimerical "emphasis of light and darkness".<sup>53</sup> He yields to the perception of forms that thrive in his mind's eye; the art visualizes his tortured visions of a fictive world:

...the torments of the imagination and the surprise she gave me under my pencil ... directed ... those surprises in accordance with the laws of the organism of art which I know, which I feel, with the single goal of producing in the spectator, by sudden attraction, the whole evocation, and the whole enticement of the uncertain within the confines of thought.<sup>54</sup>

Redon's acquiescence to the realm of the imagination similarly recalls Poe's tormented psychological writings. Both men subscribe to the belief that internal thoughts produce dynamic and horrific impressions of a psycho-spiritual world.

<sup>50</sup> E. Hennequin, "Beaux-Arts: Odilon Redon", *Revue littéraire et artistique* 5, (March 4, 1882), pp 136-138, in H. Dorra (ed.), *Symbolist Art Themes: A Critical Anthology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1994, 51.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p 52.

<sup>52</sup> O. Redon, "Confessions of an Artist", in *To Myself: Notes on Life, Art and Artists*, trans. M. Jacob and J.L. Wasserman, New York 1986, p 21. *A Soi-même [To Myself]* is a compilation of notes, letters and statements written by Redon during his lifetime. It was published posthumously by his wife and follows much of Redon's own mis-information tactics. Douglas Druick states that "[*A Soi-même*] must be addressed with some caution. For these representations Redon made of his life were highly self-conscious". Druick, *Prince of Dreams*, Art Institute of Chicago, 1994, p 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p 21.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p 21.

An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This is it which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odours, and sentiments amid which he exists.<sup>55</sup>

However, Redon's images, while they are mysterious evocations of a dream world, are highly contrived, analytical compositions. Early in his career, Jean Baptiste Camille Corot told Redon "Next to an unknown, place a known".<sup>56</sup> The many compositions Redon created reflect Corot's statement; the images emerge from a certain logic that blends the imaginative with the real in order to better "organize[s] their structure".<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Poe proposed that in the making of any artistic work, "no ... composition is referrible [*sic*] either to accident or intuition ... the work proceeds, step by step, to its completion with the rigid consequences of a mathematical problem".<sup>58</sup>

Redon unifies his perceptions of the natural world with visions from his fantastic world. As a result, his lithographs and *noirs* liberally introduce a variety of figures. In particular, the caption-based lithographs indicate a sort of subconscious *vers libre* [free verse]. He "freely mixed what he saw with what he imagined, refusing to distinguish between these two experiences".<sup>59</sup> Redon brings his visionary images, which are either a response to or a translation of his imagination, to life on a two-dimensional surface. The result is a sophisticated visual "vocabulary ... with the structural freedom of poetry"<sup>60</sup> that Redon continuously references throughout his career. The compositions are the amalgamation of recognizable forms such as eyes, balloons and heads that he merges with

<sup>55</sup> E.A. Poe, "The Poetic Principle", *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, New York 1984, p 76.

<sup>56</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 29.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p 23.

<sup>58</sup> Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, orig. published April 1846 in *Grahams Magazine*, New York 1984, pp 14 -5.

<sup>59</sup> J. Rewald, "Odilon Redon", in *Odilon Redon/Gustave Moreau/Rodolphe Bresdin*, exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1961, p 11.

<sup>60</sup> Druick and Zegers, "Taking Wing, 1870-1878", p 105.



a variety of geometric and composite forms. The six lithographs of *A Edgar Poë*, analyzed in Chapter Two, epitomize Redon's structural and creative freedom when designing compositions.

Of the seven total images in *A Edgar Poë*, the introductory image [fig.1.1a] of the album sets the tone for the subsequent plates. The central figure calls to mind the physiognomy of Poe. Baudelaire's *Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages* describes Poe:

... His features were not large, but quite regular, his complexion light brown, his face sad and abstracted ... there was something painful about it. His eyes, singularly beautiful, seemed dark gray at first glance, but on closer examination appeared to be tinged with an indefinable light violet tone. As for his forehead, it was superb.<sup>61</sup>

The front figure, representative of Poe, stands before a parapet and Doric column. The large forehead and high brow recalls Baudelaire's description. Redon visually guesses what Poe looked like. He creates the figure by utilizing both the male and female form which romanticizes the poet. The head sits on a thin, slightly elongated, neck; the torso extends down towards the parapet like an inverted narrow triangle. Redon juxtaposes the pallid complexion of Poe's figure with the black wing-like hair surrounding his head. The solid architectural environment encroaches on the figure. Criss-crossing hatch marks fill the torso and emphasize the placement of the arms and neck. The head, with its sculpted eyebrows and small nose, is empty of hatch marks. Redon shades the face; its darkness results from the interior room's infringement upon Poe's form. The white of his forehead and chest focuses the viewer's attention. His figure is an off-centre focal point for the image.

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<sup>61</sup> S.F. Eisenman, *The Temptation of Saint Redon: Biography, Ideology and Style in the 'Noirs' of Odilon Redon*, Chicago 1992, p 108.

Poe's left eye gazes directly out of the composition; his right is covered in shadow. His right shoulder is draped with a dark cloak. He gathers the fabric in his left hand, pulling the cloak over his abdomen. Under the right shoulder, he holds a book in his hands. Redon dresses him in the garb of a poet; the black cloak, in addition to the book, symbolizes the fruits of Poe's intellectual labour. Under the elbow of the left arm, obscured within the cloak's folds of fabric, Redon hides a face. Perhaps the unintentional result of shadow and colour, the profile of the face turns away from Poe's figure and looks towards the wheel. Unlike the indistinct outline of Poe's body, the line between the cloak and the column is marked definitively with strong black lines. The cloak-face is Redon's conceptualization of a grotesque countenance. The eyes droop towards the parapet and the angular mouth scowls in a grimace. Opposite Poe, beneath the right elbow, he places a dense questionable shape suggestive of a skull. It is without the jaw and mouth. Redon emphasizes the gleaming white cranium juxtaposed with the black vacant eyes, which recall Baudelaire's statement about Poe's 'singularly beautiful' eyes and his 'superb' forehead. The two faces on either side of Poe, one intentional, the other, uncertain, surround the figure of the poet with death and incertitude.

Redon locates the figure of Poe amidst an environment of architectural foundations. While being an important setting for the figure, the architecture refers to Redon's academic training as an architect.<sup>62</sup> Poe stands before a Doric column supporting a pediment or portico. To his left, and truncated by the column, is a large wheel. The columns' shading renders it three-dimensionally, while the wheel is un-shaded. The

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<sup>62</sup> Redon, primarily to please his father, began a formal training in architecture at the age of seventeen. In "Confessions of an Artist" he asserts: "I did much descriptive geometry, piles of working drawings, a whole preparation for the so-called School of Fine Arts where I failed the oral examination ... but nothing is lost in

wheel breaks the perpendicular pediment or portico. Redon covers the forms with expansive black and grey hues which turn the architecture into opaque shapes that practically disappear. The column, parapet, pediment, and background wall blend together forcing the figures of Poe, the door, and the wheel to pop out. The wheel balances the composition. Its whiteness counter-balances the blackness of the door.

Redon's placement of a door, over Poe's right shoulder and behind his figure, divides the shaded external architecture from the blackness of the interior. Within the door stands a haunting figure in profile. The face and body are turned left. The head is bald. Its nose appears to have been re-worked by Redon. The lips turn down in a frown and the jaw is extremely angular. When examined closely, short, brusque lines surround the form of the head that encircle it like an aura. This gives the head a stitch-like quality as if it is not actually attached to its body but, rather, floating like a skull over the haunting human form behind it. The figure's body traverses the length of the door towards the parapet. It is absorbed by the blackness before completely disappearing behind Poe's right arm. Directly above Poe's right shoulder, the form of a hand is barely discernible. The fingers curl and extend in a gesture of supplication. Poe's story "William Wilson" (1839-1840) deals with the supposed double of a living person, a *doppelgänger*. The haunting figure standing in the shadow-doorway represents Poe's other half, his *doppelgänger*. This also introduces Baudelaire's concept of *dédoublement*. The figure of Poe, the 'poe-t' of Redon's lithograph, is juxtaposed with his double self, whose shadowy form represents the muse, conscience or tormentor.

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study: I think I owe much as a painter to the study I carried out as an aspiring architect". See Redon, *To Myself*, p 17.



The introductory image, placed on the verso side of the first page, integrates figures with architectural forms setting the tone for the six lithographs of *A Edgar Poë*. The album is not restrained with a binding; all the compositions are on loose pages. The title page [no image available] simply states the title, in capitalized letters, A EDGAR POË. Under the title, Redon states the medium, 6 lithographies. Between the medium, and Redon's name (in capital letters), ODILON REDON, he placed a skull. Concluding the title page is the publisher's information which is printed at the bottom of the page: PARIS. G. Fischbacher Editions (In script). 33, Rue Seine, 33. There is no date on the title page; instead, Redon dated the introductory image along the bottom center.

The images of *A Edgar Poë* stand as independent entities within a sequence. When brought together, the series of plates form a unit of compositions, which can be 'read' like lines of poetry. Redon uses recurring objects and themes, relying on repetition to unify each successive image. The lack of a chronological numbering device liberates the images. No two are bound together through a dictated order. Rather, by being non-sequential, the images relate from one to all. The reoccurring objects and themes signify patterns which ensure that the images relate to one another in whatever sequence they are placed.

... Any idea which could be expressed in words is subordinated to the impressions produced purely by pictorial touches... A picture thus conceived will leave in the mind a lasting impression that words could not translate... In a literary composition there is no single impression. The effect is contained uniquely in the ideas born from it.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 68.

*A Edgar Poë* expresses Redon's impressions of Poe's words through 'pictorial' forms. His ability to translate verbal imagery into visual images (containing a multitude of impressions) imbues the compositions of *A Edgar Poë* with logical ambiguity.

The album's enigmatic visions keep the viewer interested. Redon works to confuse his viewers. He creates vague and bizarre images. But, also, he poetically verbalizes his compositions via captions, which he places at the bottom border of the lithograph.

Les légends inscrites au bas de planches de l'album *A Edgar Poe* (1882) dénoncent à quel point il a pressenti dans le conteur américain un esprit fraternal. ... Quoique des ignorants aient pu prétendre, ce ne sont pas des phrases prises à Poe que répètent ces légendes. Elles sont inventées par le lithographe, et concrétisent son émoi personnel, son rêve, que les rêves du grand poète ont provoqués.

[The legends inscribed at the base of the plates of the album *To Edgar Poe* (1882) indicate at which point he sensed in the American writer a fraternal spirit. ... Although some ignorant people may have been able to claim, these are not phrases taken from Poe that repeat these legends. The legends were devised by the lithographer, rendered tangible his personal turmoil, his dream, which the dreams of the great poet inspired.]<sup>64</sup>

Redon's cryptic captions reiterate some of the forms present in the companion composition. While, often, a caption speaks beyond (or in an alternate voice from) the composition, he poetizes the images through the use of the captions. However, he warns his viewers not to take the rhetorical statements too seriously. He emphasizes that his artwork is a "little door opening onto a mystery ... It is up to [the viewer] to go further".<sup>65</sup>

Redon grounds the paradoxical compositions of *A Edgar Poë* by creating patterns that emanate from the human form. He manipulates the five senses in order to unite the

<sup>64</sup> A. Fontaines, "Odilon Redon", *Mercure de France*, 16 Aout 1916, p 583, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943).

<sup>65</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 77.

series under various different modes of perception. Throughout the series of plates, all five senses are represented. Some are elevated while others are devalued. The potency of his images often depends on the inclusion or exclusion of particular senses. The portrayal of a sense humanizes his characters present in the compositions. In this regard, 'character' is not limited to Redon's representation of a human. Rather, it refers to objects or forms in which he bestows one or more of the senses. He personifies that which is not human. He inserts realistic imagery, the senses, into the imaginative world of the compositions.

... I have offered...in drawings and lithographs varied human expressions... I have tried to make [imaginary beings] logical with the logic of the structure of visible beings.<sup>66</sup>

In this way, Redon does not render the natural world. Rather, he makes his imaginative visions seem natural. Similarly, in "The Raven", Poe bestows human qualities to a bird which allows it the power of speech:

I did not fail to perceive ... the pre-assumption that the word was to be so continuously or monotonously spoken by *a human* being ... Here, then, immediately arose the idea of a *non-reasoning* creature capable of speech.<sup>67</sup>

Like Poe, Redon gives human attributes to things. He places the imaginative compositions of *A Edgar Poë* within the confines of nature.

Redon employs the sense of sight most often throughout *A Edgar Poë*. Varying in shapes and sizes, the eye or eyes within any composition are never closed. Rather, they sometimes are disconnected through the use of shade. Often, the other four senses pictured are represented as non-functioning, but the eyes (vision) are almost always shown open. The open eye symbolizes activity. The gaze of an eye often rests on

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<sup>66</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 98.

something or someone, whether it is within the composition or out in the realm of the viewer. He plays with alternative views of depiction. He often changes the placement of the eye, the size of the eye, and even the number of eyes present in any one composition. The eyes reflect the mood of each lithograph. Light or shade determines the presence of melancholy or happiness. In the introductory image, haunted by his *doppelgänger*, the Poe figure looks beyond the confines of the composition. He stares out into the space of the viewer. His left eye holds its gaze; the right is covered in shadow. The pupil is fixed. This gaze is not of terror or supplication. Rather, it is an invitation for the viewer to meet his gaze and then explore the environment that confines him. He is placed amidst a structure of temporal forms indicative of a theatrical set. Perhaps the figure of Poe stands with a variety of nineteenth-century ideas of industrialization: the wheel represents the clogs of a clock or the turbines of a machine in a large factory. The poetic bard of Poe, the creator of man's darkest psychological horrors, is overwhelmed by technology and haunted by his *doppelgänger*. His past, present, and future are all controlled by an uncontrollable sense of fear. In contrast to Poe, the *doppelgänger* figure faces left, the side synonymous with evil. His eye, black and hollow, is in profile. Yet, its oval shape also vacantly faces the direction of the viewer. While his eye may look in both directions, his shoulders turn putting his body in profile. The assaulting vacant gaze of the *doppelgänger* merges the interior subconscious of Poe with Redon's imaginative 'real' world of architectural forms. Redon invites the viewer to experience his world of imagination and of suggestion relying on the "aesthetic principle of vagueness".<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", p 18. Italics are Poe's emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> H. Dorra, "Prologue: Baudelaire, Delacroix, and the Premises of Symbolist Aesthetics", in H. Dorra (ed.), *Symbolist Art Themes: A Critical Anthology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1994, p 5.

Often, the figure of the eye behaves as a device for orienting the viewer within any composition. The subversion of the other senses supplements the eye. In most of the images the eye dominates the composition. However, Redon often severs the other senses from the 'human' forms of which they are part. He removes ears, mouths, noses and hands. Heads are detached from their bodies. He de-senses the characters of his lithographs. Similarly, Poe elevates certain faculties of the human mind and body while eliminating others. Many of his characters are described as being oversensitive. Their mind is un-refined. Their ability to make rational decisions still exists but moral philosophy is gone. Redon's images in *A Edgar Poë* suggest Poe's exaltation of particular senses through their grand scale when compared to other figures within a composition. Redon relies on technical boundaries to limit his imaginary visions. He utilizes the frame and geometric forms to sever particular senses. And, he makes monsters by combining nature with imagination, just like Poe made monsters by associating man with a beast like amorality. Each is like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. They create monsters built from composite human parts put together. But, also, the monsters are without some fundamental (structural) parts. In either prose or lithography, Poe and Redon manufactured human-monsters that are uniquely terrible, ugly, horrific and, yet, oddly beautiful. Like Poe, whose interest was to represent the apparent contradictions alert in the human mind, Redon portrayed the good and evil characteristics alive in the human spirit. His compositions of *A Edgar Poë* explore his own imaginative visions and bring into existence Poe's horrible realities. In doing so, the employment of the senses devises an iconographic logical pattern that, through repetition, unifies the compositions.

## Poe and Redon, A Non-Relationship

Whether or not the low regard Redon later professed for Poe is rooted in fact is in part immaterial ... this act of homage was a vehicle for self-preservation.<sup>69</sup>

In nineteenth-century France, Poe was an established and idolized literary artist. Yet, he never knew to what great esteem the French held his work. Redon's artistic reception was the result of his visual homage to the American poet and writer; he wanted to "win over a public by exploiting contemporary literary fashion".<sup>70</sup> However, it seems strange that late in his life, Redon alleges that Poe had no effect on the creation of the album.

Redon's second major exhibition took place in the offices of the newspaper, *Le Gaulois*, in 1882. His graphic works consisted of "twenty-two charcoal drawings ... [which] offered to the public a delight likely to surprise the most fastidious".<sup>71</sup> Critics, like Huysmans and Hennequin, claim that Redon's art has no visual forefather. Rather, he is an "exceptional master who, aside from Goya, has no ancestors and no disciples".<sup>72</sup> Redon's work, particularly the album *A Edgar Poë*, is considered as literary art that has its "precursors ... in Baudelaire and Poe".<sup>73</sup> His literary resources and influences disassociate him from the visual arts and place him within the confines of literature. Richard Hobbs' monograph, *Odilon Redon*, discusses the harm that Redon's contemporary (often literary) critics did to the interpretation of his work.

<sup>69</sup> Druick and Zegers, "In the Public Eye", p 134.

<sup>70</sup> R. Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, London 1977, p 38.

<sup>71</sup> Hennequin, "Beaux-Arts: Odilon Redon", p 49.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p 49.

<sup>73</sup> Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, p 33.



The uninhibited license of such judgments is an early indication of the disadvantages for Redon of the praise of writers. Such praise was eloquent and voluble, but also distorting and misleading.<sup>74</sup>

Huysmans, more than Hennequin, emphasized Redon's association with the avant-garde's literary heroes of Baudelaire and Poe. It is Huysmans *A Rebours* that "transformed Redon's 'noirs' into a literary motif in their own right".<sup>75</sup> Especially because Redon and Poe seemingly had similar themes, the nineteenth-century French avant-garde brought the two artists together, in accordance with their artistic relations and personal resemblances. In short, critics mislabeled Redon as the Poe of the visual arts.

Armand Clavaud, a botanist and friend, first introduced Redon to Baudelaire's translations of Poe, giving him "*Les Fleurs du Mal*, *Madame Bovary* and translations of Edgar Allan Poe at the time of their publication".<sup>76</sup> The impact of literature upon Redon's art begins at this stage. It fundamentally altered his subject matter. Before being introduced to the likes of Baudelaire and Poe (and later, Flaubert and Pascal), under the tutelage of Rodolphe Bresdin, Redon made narrative etchings. Now, the subconscious free musings of the literary artists liberated his work from being purely narrative. His new art monochromatically juxtaposed black and white forms. The images took on characteristics indicative of Baudelaire and Poe by weaving science, psychology and spirituality. The effect is a rhythmical undulation of unconventional forms. The avant-garde literature introduced by Clavaud oriented Redon's art in the literary circle. Specifically, the album *A Edgar Poë* demonstrates his "ambivalent but unmistakable debt

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<sup>74</sup> Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, p 33.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p 34.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p 11. See also Redon's own writings on Clavaud in *To Myself*, pp 14-15.

to literary supporters".<sup>77</sup> Hobbs asserts that particular compositions within *A Edgar Poë* demonstrate Redon's independence from Poe. He claims that Redon has no debts to the American writer's subject matter. However, in the composition *Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE*, evidence (taken from the image itself and seen in Chapter Two) suggests the contrary belief that Redon was not completely free from the influence of Poe. Redon may not have cited direct passages out of Poe's stories, but he evokes Poe by effecting a moody setting with dark and mysterious compositions.

The work of *A Edgar Poë* comprises a series of imaginative musings that depicts an intellectual world composed of a variety of indeterminate forms. Redon wanted to confuse. So, he fabricated a bizarre world in his albums that attracted his viewers need for "the obscure and cerebral world of the indeterminate".<sup>78</sup> He wanted to dissuade his biographer, André Mellerio, and his critics, Huysmans and Hennequin, from labeling or defining his art. Poe's own stories are "restrained understatement[s] ... [of] suggestion and implication",<sup>79</sup> which were written to intrigue his viewers. The horrific subject matter meant to frighten and titillate their psycho-spiritual innermost desires for the perverse. Poe capitalized on the power of suggestion. He relied on the creation of an atmosphere where descriptive 'real' settings are integrated with fanciful imaginings. For Poe, "vagueness [was] essential".<sup>80</sup> Redon envisions his own uncertain imaginative representations in the fashion of Poe. His images intimate rather than explicate meaning. The opacity present in Redon's captions is furthered as a result of knowing Poe's work.

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<sup>77</sup> Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, p 38.

<sup>78</sup> Leeman, "Odilon Redon: The Image and the Text", p 180.

<sup>79</sup> Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, p 33.

<sup>80</sup> C.M. Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination*, London 1950, p 192.

Towards the end of his artistic career Redon made efforts to free himself from Poe's supposed outright influence. Mellerio began in the late stage of Redon's career to compile notes, letters and essays in order to publish a *catalogue raisonné* on the artist. He asked Redon to comment on the importance (or in Redon's eyes, non-importance) of Poe's work for the album *A Edgar Poë*. Redon curtly "denied even liking Poe's writing".<sup>81</sup> He simply wanted to exploit the "suggestive power created by the combination of word and image ... saying that he himself had 'put some words under [the plates]' ".<sup>82</sup> In a letter addressed to André Mellerio, Redon proclaims his dislike of Poe.

La lecture du poète américain m'avait été maintes fois conseillée comme devant me donner un appui à mon art. On se trompait, je crois; ses contes ne sont pas mon livre de chevet.

[I had been repeatedly advised to read the American poet on the assumption that it would provide inspiration for my art. This was a mistake, I think; his stories are not my favourite reading.]<sup>83</sup>

These statements de-mystify the myth of the two artists having a similar temperament. Yet, it is odd to acknowledge that while Redon sought to negate Poe's works as having been an influence, there is no direct proof (except the album *A Edgar Poë*) that Redon ever admired Poe. Rather, critics like Huysmans and Hennequin assumed and their assumption was enough to propel the notion that Redon gleaned much from Poe.

However, Redon believed that there existed a non-relationship as opposed to a relationship. He saw Poe's work as a non-influence even though direct associations can be made between the artists' oeuvres. Therefore the concept of the 'relationship' became a non-relationship as Redon sought to deny the unmistakable link that exists in the nature of

<sup>81</sup> Leeman, "Odilon Redon: The Image and the Text", p 180.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>83</sup> Redon "*Peyrelebadé*, 21 Juillet 1898", p 31.

their works. He struggled to distance himself from the perception that he was an artist reliant on literature for inspiration. However, while Redon was not dependent on Poe for his inspiration, his visions stylistically recall Poe's hidden, analytical logic. Late in his life, Redon wished to move beyond albums of a literary nature. In the beginning and in the end, Redon made art that was suggestive. But, as will be seen in the album *A Edgar Poe*, Redon's art of suggestion and Poe's art of evocation come together.

## Chapter 2 *A Edgar Poë*, THE ALBUM OF 1882

Every poet resembles other poets and yet is different from them. He resembles them in function; he is different in the way he carries it out. He cannot ignore what preceded him, yet he cannot repeat it; he must go further.<sup>1</sup>

The essence of the above quote affirms the precedence that all art is interconnected. In the case of Odilon Redon and Edgar Allan Poe, the similarity between their art comes full circle in the knowledge that Redon read Poe's works. The visual art Redon made was undoubtedly affected by the highly visual stories Poe wrote. Yet, between these two artists' rests a great divide not only the result of time and distance, but also due to the fact that these two men were from very different cultures. Redon's creative ability to translate Poe's stories into compositions is due to his ability to interpret, and to interpret liberally, what Redon thought were Poe's intentions. Like the above quote, Redon 'resembles' Poe in function but he is different in the way he 'carries it out'. The final lithographic image shows the differences between these very similar artists as Redon pushes himself to explore Poe's most degenerate and complex characters in an extremely simple and refined fashion.

While Redon may not have fully comprehended the subtle nuances of Poe's stories, he relied on interpretation to enhance his own perceptions of the characters and their situations.

They only [grasped] the surface meaning, the ideas and images ... the less they understand, the more, in some ways, they create.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Chiari, *Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé: The Growth of a Myth*, London 1956, p 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p 95.

Redon took Poe with poe-etic license. What he may not have understood due to cultural constraints, he threw aside and utilized his own experience as a tool for envisioning Poe's world. Redon visually integrated the unreal, subconscious world with the actual world of human consciousness. His production of *A Edgar Poë* depended on his ability to make something new, an artwork that differed from those works which had set precedence. He created artwork that was both new and as a result of the numerous works that came before him. If Chapter One introduced Redon's employment of a visual iconographic pattern, composed of a definitive set of core forms uniting the six lithographs together, then Chapter Two deals with the individual lithographs of *A Edgar Poë* as autonomous compositions. Each lithograph is distinguishable and unique. However, basic elements root the images in Redon's visual logic and in stories or poems from Poe's oeuvre. Des Esseintes from *A Rebours* categorized Redon's art as images "which plunged into the horrific realms of bad dreams and fevered visions".<sup>3</sup> In particular, his lithographs contain bizarre motifs, which are contrived executions in a Poe-esque horror genre. Poe's literature behaves as a sort of 'stepping-stone' that allows Redon the opportunity to proclaim his seminal visions that comment on the macabre nature of the modern man.

Redon's visions are the result of his interest in Poe and in his surrounding environment, especially his depressed beliefs that days containing both the spiritual and the ideal are numbered:

... days are coming when the unanimity of wishes will make of the law a docile expression of the great human conscience and, consequently, the only prime mover for liberty.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J.-K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by R. Baldick, New York 1959, p 73.

<sup>4</sup> O. Redon, *To Myself: Notes on Life, Art and Artists*, trans. M. Jacob and J.L. Wasserman, New York 1986, p 30.



This melancholic belief thrived in and amongst the artists of the *fin-de-siècle*. Contemporary with Redon, in Russia, Leo Tolstoy's *What is Art?* starkly evokes a similar perspective:

I know that according to an opinion current in our times religion is a superstition that humanity has outgrown, and it is therefore assumed that no such thing exists as a religious perception common to us all.<sup>5</sup>

However, Tolstoy sees art as redemption. For him, art transcends the differences between men while also curing man of psychological weakness. The album *A Edgar Poë* lacks Tolstoy's sense of hope in that, Redon creates a series of works that perverts and explores the melancholic disposition in man. The album does not offer reconciliation. *A Edgar Poë* renders Poe's stories of the romantic American grotesque in a series of visual (and verbal) compositions, which explore the perverse degeneration of man.

The six lithographs of *A Edgar Poë* are examined in accordance to the conventional order favoured by Alfred Werner. For the sake of convenience this chapter adopts the conventional standard. This chapter also employs the use of the page break in order to emphasize the move from one independent image to the next. It is not the intention here to disregard Redon's dismissal of using numbers that would orient the series of lithographs. While it is evident that the compositions lack a specific order they are, at the same time, united under the title *A Edgar Poë*. The images are not bound to any one categorical sequence. This enables Redon's viewers the opportunity to visually 'read' through the compositions any way they see fit. The viewing order allows for interaction and participation to occur between the work and the viewer. Unlike Redon's other albums, which were numbered, *A Edgar Poë* is open for a variety of interpretations.

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<sup>5</sup> L. Tolstoy, *What is Art? and Essays on Art*, trans. A. Maude, London 1938, p 233.

The following analysis deals with each lithograph as an autonomous work of art; the individual compositions are removed from the context of *A Edgar Poë*. It is the presence of Redon's visual iconography that inextricably unites the six images. Therefore, the album establishes him as an artist who worked in the vague subtleties of black and white. It authenticates his continual use of ambiguity in his creative process and it demonstrates his interest in the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

***L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI****The eye like a strange balloon moves toward INFINITY*

L'oeil désorbité, laissant au loin une terre désolée et nue remonte vers le ciel ainsi qu'un ballon tête vise à moitié. (Dessin antérieur).

[The eye removed from its socket, leaving in the distance a desolate and bare land, climbs towards the sky like a balloon, the head design in half. (Earlier Illustration).]<sup>6</sup>

The first lithograph, *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*, [fig.2.1] is an ambiguous picture containing “mystery, anguish, delirium [and] fright”<sup>7</sup> and it begins the series of compositions in the album *A Edgar Poë*. The image establishes a link between his *noirs* and the album because it duplicates one of his earlier *noir* compositions, *Eye-Balloon* (1878) [fig.2.2]. In *Eye-Balloon*, about one-third of the composition contains a stark landscape. Beginning at the centre of the horizon line, which ends at the left border, Redon has drawn a cloud-like ground. The whiteness of the ground deeply contrasts the opaque horizon. The colour contradiction is suggestive as representing both ocean and land. Redon distinguishes texture and depth through his handling of the charcoal. He obscures the right and left portions of the landscape while at the same time articulating the centre, making the horizon appear flat. Beneath the horizon, Redon inserts a reed-like plant; the white, feathery reeds extend into the striated, dark landscape. The plant's placement enhances the deceptive landscape. The juxtaposition of the plant and landscape, if associated with the sea, questions the interpretation of the landscape. Is this landscape representative of land or sea? Or

<sup>6</sup> A. Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>7</sup> O. Redon, *The Graphic Works of Odilon Redon*, Intro. by A. Werner, New York 1969, p XIII.

perhaps, recalling Redon's penchant for being vague, could the image be an alternate reality that blends both land and sea together?

An inch above the horizon Redon portrays the vessel of a balloon. Contrary to an actual balloon, which carries a basket, *Eye-Balloon* bears a severed head on a platter. The edge of the salver breaks the head at the cheek. Not pictured is the existence (or non-existence) of the mouth. Due to the placement of the lip of the plate, the mouth is disconnected from the rest of the head. Barely discernible over the rim of the platter is the nose, which is flanked with two large round eyes. Both of the pupils gaze rests over the reed-like plant. A shadow falls over the eyes and nose. Only a small, intense light accents each eye, which gives them a sad, dream-like expression. Also illuminated is the broad, expansive forehead; the skull appears to be covered with a cap, perhaps the safety covering worn by balloonists of the nineteenth-century.

Numerous cords that are attached to the balloon, which looks more like a floating giant-eye than a mode of transportation, suspend the severed head. The giant-eye balloon is harshly outlined with strong black lines punctuated with a variety of different markings. This creates the impression of the eye's monumentality and form. Lines, symbolic of eyelashes, radiate from the eye. Redon blurs the charcoal along the contour of the eye giving it a sombre, melancholic countenance. The iris and pupil turn their gaze towards the sky above. The anthropomorphic qualities of the eye enhance the balloon, which bestows unnatural characteristics upon an actual object. The balloon is not unlike the Cyclops, the mythical creation that incorporates monstrous features with human

attributes.<sup>8</sup> In this way, *Eye-Balloon* establishes Redon's propensity towards populating his visual worlds with elements taken from nature and fiction. He surrounds the colossal eye with an expansive sky. In many respects, the balloon dominates the heavens it inhabits. Surrounding it are lightly drawn lines, indicating movement, and showing the disruption of the atmosphere encircling the balloon.

The comparison between *Eye-Balloon* and the first composition in *A Edgar Poë*, *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*, clearly shows why Redon chose lithography as the medium for duplicating his drawings. It also demonstrates his uncertainty with regards to the lithographic technique. The two compositions are remarkably similar. There is no doubt that *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* has its origin in *Eye-Balloon*. "Given [Redon's] predilection for charcoal drawing", Fantin-Latour led him specifically "in the direction of transfer paper".<sup>9</sup> This allowed Redon to draw peremptory paper designs that contain elements intrinsic to his creative process. He then transferred the drawings directly onto the stone. However, this method often eliminates the sketchy, delicate nuances of the charcoal medium. When *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* is stylistically compared to *Eye-Balloon*, the subtle gradations of line and color achieved with charcoal are absent. When in lithographic form, *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* is a tightly rendered reproduction of *Eye-Balloon*. The final lithographic plate appears rigid and stagnant compared to the *noir*, which seems greasy and fluid.

<sup>8</sup> Redon created numerous images after the mythical Cyclops throughout his career. See *Odilon Redon/Gustave Moreau/Rodolphe Bresdin*, exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1961, p 28 and p 64 for images.

<sup>9</sup> T. Gott, *The Enchanted Stone: The Graphic Worlds of Odilon Redon*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 1990, p 30.

Redon places both *Eye-Balloon* and *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* over a barren landscape which alludes to Redon's homeland of Medoc; it is "reminiscent of the *landes*".<sup>10</sup> Each balloon "is not captive"<sup>11</sup> or tethered to the ground, granting them autonomy over the barren landscape. They represent freedom and liberation. Pictured in 'flight', the balloon provides Redon independence from the stagnant "landscape of his youth, from which he [can] draw creative strength".<sup>12</sup> Both the *noir* and lithograph release his art while, at the same time, intimating the importance of aviation. During Redon's lifetime, balloon navigation offered people the opportunity to experience the sky as a new frontier. The balloon's invention pushed the limits of human development, enabling the public to explore the world from a new perspective. Alfred Werner suggests that Redon's giant-eye balloon represents the "practical potential of aerial locomotion".<sup>13</sup> Redon himself stated that the idea for *Eye-Balloon* originated in the much-publicized Henri Giffard 'Grand Balloon Captif' [fig.2.3], "the immense hydrogen balloon in which thousands of visitors to the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle were treated to a birds-eye view of the capital".<sup>14</sup> 'Grand Balloon Captif' allowed civilians, artists and photographers alike to see the topography of their modern world. Ballooning also encouraged a variety of visual representations due to the use of different vantage points. The poster that publicizes 'Grand Balloon Captif' and *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*, while similar, differ on two points. Firstly, the poster's balloon is tethered to the ground or *captif* [captive]. This permitted the passengers to

<sup>10</sup> D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers, "Taking Wing, 1870-1878", in D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers (eds), *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams 1840-1916*, exh. cat., The Art Institute of Chicago 1994, p 113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p 114.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p 114.

<sup>13</sup> Redon, *The Graphic Works of Odilon Redon*, p XIII.

<sup>14</sup> Druick and Zegers, "Taking Wing, 1870-1878", p 113.



experience the 'Panorama de Paris' from an ordained height, whereas, Redon's balloon is independent. Secondly, Redon's balloon is lower to the ground as compared to the great height of the 'Grand Balloon Captif'. Both portrayals situate the balloons over a landscape and, while Redon's is stark, the balloon in the poster floats over the expansive Parisian metropolis. Each depiction, which deals with the notion of perspective, shows the balloon at an elevated height where a distance of land is discernible. Redon accentuates the perception of perspective through his creation of a giant-eye balloon that dominates the horizon. The eye constitutes almost one-third of the balloon itself. However, unlike the intended earthbound gaze of 'Grand Balloon Captif', the giant-eye balloon looks up and away from the barren landscape beneath it.

Redon's reworking of *Eye-Balloon* for the album *A Edgar Poë* makes some alterations to the original image specifically with regards to the severed head. Unlike the charcoal drawing, the entire form of the head is perceptible on the salver. It has more sensorial features, which suggests a more human severed head. Contrary to the barely recognizable nose in the *noir*, the lithograph possesses a broad, primitive nose. The placement of each eye is almost exactly the same. However, in the *noir*, both eyes are recognizably illuminated by tiny highlights of white light. In *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*, shadow covers the right eye while the left eye is lit. The fact that the right eye is suppressed by shadow suggests that the image is more uncertain with regards to the direction of the gaze. The hair on the severed heads from each piece differs. In *Eye-Balloon*, there is no noticeable hair; the skull is covered with some sort of cap. *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* recalls Poe's figure from the introductory image (fig.1.1a); the hair is long, black, un-cut and untamed. Whereas, *Eye-*

*Balloon* carries what appears to be the depiction of a nineteenth-century balloonist. His severed head, by orientation of its physical features, represents a civilized person who explores the earth from his elevated balloon perspective. The balloon carries a culturally developed (perhaps, elite) head. Whereas, the severed head from the lithograph contains more primitive and barbaric characteristics. The prevalence of imperialism in the nineteenth-century becomes evident in Redon's art the moment he replaces the civilized head with the savage. *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* caricatures the original head from *Eye-Balloon*. What was once a head with large, innocent and active eyes is replaced with perverted facial features. Now the eyes are absent-minded and vacant. His presentation of a severed head as primitive rather than civilized imbues the form with vulgarity.

Redon explores the idea of the primitive in his 1877 *noir* entitled *After the Execution* [fig. 2.4]. The primitive man is portrayed as a Jack-in-the-box, which relegates this 'savage' to nothing more than a toy. His severed human head sits on top of a box with a Greco-Roman frieze. This surrounds the dejected head with representations of classicism. If his head were placed back in the box, the primitive man is contained in an intellectual and philosophical environment stemming from antiquity. In particular, Redon and other artists of the nineteenth-century found the primitive alluring, but there is nothing particularly beautiful about *After the Execution*. The man has been disconnected from his body; he has been put on show. In this way, Redon's artwork embraces the sacred and profane attributes of the severed head. It is a motif that he often uses throughout his career, specifically in the *noirs* and lithographs. The idea of the severed head is an iconographic image in Symbolist art. It began in the Romantic belief that

woman was the principal origin of evil. Particularly, the severed head recalls the story of Salome who danced for King Herod and who, at the conclusion of her dance, asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.<sup>15</sup> *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* merges aspects of Salome and his earlier *noir*, *After the Execution*. The profanity of the severed head transcends (and is literally lifted) above the flat landscape.

### The Balloon in Poe

The fact that *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* developed from the earlier charcoal *noir*, *Eye-Balloon*, seems to disassociate the image from the works of Edgar Allan Poe. However, Redon's balloon, as a fictional device for aviation, links the two artists. For Poe, ballooning proved to be both a fantastic and scientific form of human exploration. His prose concerning aerial locomotion narrates the possibility for flight and what that means with regards to the progression (and documentation) of mankind. He also recognizes the utter absurdity of flying. His texts glamorize and humorize the flights of fancy. His writings blend reality with fantasy; he invariably confuses the reader's mind into believing the ridiculous to be true.

In the story entitled "The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall" (1834-35), Poe subverts the main character's, one Hans Pfaall's, most obvious personal flaws. He is a man who embarks upon a journey towards scientific discovery. In an attempt to escape the payment of his loans, Pfaall believes he has stumbled upon an unexplored scholarly theory that will lead him (and his creditors) to wealth. His scheme involves the creation

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<sup>15</sup> Gustave Moreau's famous painting, *Salome Dancing before Herod*, c. 1870, is a painting Redon knew and admired. See *Odilon Redon/Gustave Moreau/Rodolphe Bresdin*, exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1961.

of a hot air balloon that would enable him to travel to the moon. His gullible creditors believe Pfaall's ability to concoct such a device (they are, ironically, destroyed by an 'accident' as the balloon takes off). Pfaall's diary of events chronicles the experience. His journal consists of descriptions of the earth as well as his own physical complications with altitude sickness. This information is revealed to the reader through an "odd little gentlemen"<sup>16</sup> who, from a different balloon than Pfaall's, drops the diary (and explanatory letter) on Pfaall's old town. In this diary, he asserts that he has traveled in a balloon to the moon and that he now inhabits its surface. The escapist fantasy reveals the reality that Pfaall is a criminal when he requests that his debtor's crimes be absolved. This turn of events shows Poe's success at making a story concerned with analytical 'scientific exploration' ridiculous.

In a subsequent story, entitled "The Balloon-Hoax" (1844), Poe fabricates a realistic piece of journalism that describes a balloon journey across the Atlantic. He published the "Balloon-Hoax" in the New York *Sun* as a non-fiction piece of journalism. Poe's matter-of-fact story deceived the *Sun* readers. In it, he states that, if "additional information"<sup>17</sup> becomes available, as a journalist Poe is duty bound to relay it. The gimmick utilizes scientific analysis (in the form of yet another journal) to impart logic on fantasy. With the question of finding verifiable truth, "to assign a reason why [the balloon] *should* not have accomplished [its voyage]",<sup>18</sup> Poe posits that balloon travel is the only natural step in mankind's improvement: "The air, as well as the earth and ocean, has been subdued by science, and will become a common and convenient highway for

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<sup>16</sup> E.A. Poe, "The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 7.

<sup>17</sup> Poe, "The Balloon-Hoax", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 80.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p 71. Italics are Poe's emphasis.

mankind”.<sup>19</sup> The supposed impossible feat of crossing the Atlantic seems plausible to his “progress-mad”<sup>20</sup> readers who would like to embrace the possibility of continental travel. This majestic feat of aerial navigation implies the conquest of a territory. Poe’s contrived analytical writing style defeats nature’s restrictions. For him, the future contains “magnificent events...useless not to think of determining”.<sup>21</sup>

The two balloon stories, “The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall” and “The Balloon-Hoax”, explore the fantastic embellishment of realistic possibilities. Poe writes stories for the public’s enjoyment, while also experimenting with various exercises in form. He uses fiction to pursue fact. The prospect of balloon travel did exist in the early nineteenth-century. However, the destinations he grants his travelers are highly improbable for that time. Poe is a visionary who searches for scientific truth under the guise of pseudo-scientific analysis. His stories are not comprised of floating giant-eye balloons. Instead, Poe introduces the notion of absurdity by merging recognizable forms (the balloon) with un-fathomable visual constructions (traveling to and habitation on the moon or, at that time, a transatlantic journey).

### Redon’s Balloon

Redon’s imagery in *L’oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L’INFINI* integrates the imaginative with the real. He portrays the eye-balloon with both actual and fanciful parts, which establishes the bizarre composition with an apparently realistic foundation. Redon maintains coherence between all the forms through his technique. He combines

<sup>19</sup> Poe, “The Balloon-Hoax”, p 71.

<sup>20</sup> W. Bittner, *Poe: A Biography*, London 1962, p 195.

<sup>21</sup> Poe, “The Balloon-Hoax”, p 71.

differences together to make the various elements visually harmonious. The giant-eye, the balloon around the eye, the severed head and salver, and the stark landscape are the four major structural elements in the lithograph. The landscape, understood as Redon's visualization of Medoc, sets the imaginative eye-balloon within the boundaries of the real world. This vision occupies the sky over his youthful home reiterating the sense of creative stagnancy that overwhelmed Redon during his adolescence. *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* mixes his personal world with his visual imagination, uniting Redon's disjointed past and present worlds under the art of lithography.

*L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* develops the nineteenth-century ideas of human potential by propagating Redon's own vision. He makes the composition "not only an essentially modern vision, but also ... personally expressive visual poetry".<sup>22</sup> The severed forms in the lithograph signify the loss of the senses. He separates the head and giant-eye from an actual human mold. While they are no longer living humans, Redon's incorporation of the eyes makes each figure monstrous. Metaphorically, the eye behaves as the window to an individual's soul. While these mutilated forms may not be creatures capable of rational thought, the presence of the eye indicates Redon's interest in humanizing his created primitive beings. The idea of rationality is not indicative of objectivity because sight is a purely subjective sense. Sight perceives and analyzes, which results in an active participation with the world that is then categorized in the mind. However, the eyes of the severed head (remembering that one is

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<sup>22</sup> Druick and Zegers, "Taking Wing, 1870-1878", p 117.



in shadow) do not seem thoughtful. They are like eye sockets that gaze over the horizon, blankly staring.

Consider them, my soul, they are a fright!  
Like mannequins, vaguely ridiculous,  
Peculiar, terrible somnambulists,  
Beaming—who can say where—their eyes of night.<sup>23</sup>

Baudelaire's poem, "The Blind", expresses the negative vision of Redon's severed head.

These orbs, in which a spark is never seen,  
As if in looking far and wide stay raised  
On high; they never seem to cast their gaze  
Down to the street, head hung, as in a dream.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike the charcoal *Eye-Balloon*, the heads' eyes in the lithograph are without the pinpoint illumination which make them seem alive. The head, disconnected from its body, visually reiterates the apparent severance of the sense of sight. The head also lacks the sense of touch (no body), sound (no ears), and possibly, taste and speech (no mouth, only an upper lip). It no longer retains any human functions. Redon cuts the head from its body thereby disassociating it from experiencing human sensations.

The giant-eye symbolizes the subjectivity (and rationality) of sight. Unlike the vacuous eyes of the severed head, the giant-eye is open, its pupil actively searching the sky. Redon throughout his career employs the giant-eye motif; it is self-referent as it connects with his own "lazy eye" or "wandering eye".<sup>25</sup> He asserts that the eyes of the masses were "'turned toward the earth' while his were raised and 'fixed on the incomprehensible'".<sup>26</sup> His statement justifies his want for depicting the heavenly

<sup>23</sup> C. Baudelaire, "The Blind" ("Les Aveugles"), (1857), *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. with notes by J. McGowan, New York 1998, p 187.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p 187.

<sup>25</sup> Druick and Zegers, "Taking Wing, 1870-1878", p 113.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p 113. The quote reflects Druick's analysis of Redon's autobiographical character, Fakir taken from the prose piece "Le Fakir", 1870. For more information on "Le Fakir" see Druick and Zegers, "Under a Cloud, 1840-1870", p 72.

imagination. The giant-eye motif explores the incomprehensible sky. However, ironically (due to Redon's mistrust of mankind's fixed gaze), his image unites a variety of unfathomable forms. This symbolically enigmatic environment baffles his own audience, the people whose gaze Redon would like to refocus. The *noir's* pupil in the giant-eye lacks the intensity of the lithograph as it turns slightly away from the sky. *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI* focuses the gaze, utilizing the concentrated tight defining lines which orient the eye. It acutely searches the sky. The focus dwells directly above its own pupil. This narrow distinction could be the result of the technique of lithography. However, Redon intentionally altered various aspects of the composition, specifically the physique and composure of the severed head. The plausibility of him adjusting the direction and intensity of the giant eye becomes evident. The eye of the lithograph represents the ambition Redon had for his image. He wanted the public to be fixed on the incomprehensible. The giant-eye probes the unimaginable realm of the infinite, the '*L'INFINI*'.

The lithograph harmoniously interweaves the gaze, the head and the giant-eye within one unifying object: the balloon. The title of the lithograph, placed along the outside bottom border, when translated (by Alfred Werner), reads, "The eye like a strange balloon moves towards INFINITI". His translation calls *se dirige vers* in English as 'moves towards'. However, *se dirige vers* has alternate connotations that denote a variety of different meanings, which contradict the translated 'moves towards'. *Se dirige vers* also means 'to make for', 'to head for' or 'to drift'. 'To make for' or 'head for' implies an element of intent that is absent in 'moves towards'. 'To drift' may be more appropriate to apply to this lithograph because Redon may not have intended the balloon to rise up or

‘move toward’ any specific location. Rather, it could perhaps ‘drift’ (or, the earlier term, ‘float’) above the stark landscape, with no particular destination. However, the directional gaze of the giant-eye contradicts this supposed itinerant wandering. The fact that the balloon is composed of uniformly aligned imaginative parts places a lot of faith in a viewer’s perceptive abilities. Redon hopes that the viewer’s subjective ‘rational’ conclusions regarding *L’oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L’INFINI*, due to the sacred motif of the severed head, will be to orient their own gaze towards a heavenly domain. The balloon acts as a metaphor denoting purpose; a willingness to search beyond into the imagination, the supreme infinite. However, like anything that is taken on faith alone, the balloon could reach a plateau, which Redon reiterates by using the flat, barren landscape. The ‘floating’ or ‘drifting’ balloon could be stagnant; the giant-eye’s intensive gaze, in the direction of the ‘L’INFINI’, may cease to actually see.

*L’oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L’INFINI* is a composition built on relationships. The lithograph, which emerged from the charcoal *Eye-Balloon*, is as a “dessin antérieur” [“earlier illustration”]<sup>27</sup> that “constitutes a personal vision of existence and human potential”.<sup>28</sup> The balloon’s upward ascension, combined with the severed head, suggests Redon’s intention to transcend the barren landscape of his youth (his inert creative stagnancy). Turning the gaze in the direction of the INFINITE is an attempt to seek a release from the melancholic chains of his youth. The gaze of the eye is masterful, while the blind eyes of the severed head lack power. Redon’s severing of the sense of sight occurs when he removes the giant-eye from its socket, “*L’oeil désorbité*” [“The eye

<sup>27</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>28</sup> Druick and Zegers, “Taking Wing, 1870-1878”, p 117.

removed”],<sup>29</sup> thus disconnecting it from a human frame. The severing of the head is more intense. The act of mutilation annihilates multiple senses. The multiplicity of the eye motif, particularly in the first lithograph, remains highly grounded in the imaginative realm of faith. It also introduces the idea that an artist (visual or other) has an elitist vision different than that of the masses.<sup>30</sup> Redon wants people to turn their gaze from the earth to the “incomprehensible”,<sup>31</sup> illustrating that many people are blind to the surrounding environment. This blindness denotes a sense of complacency that perhaps many do not care what occurs in the workaday world. So, the haunting image of *L’oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L’INFINI* acts as a reminder of the role people (particularly through vision) have to play. The eye represents Redon’s elitist vision of existence, which documents the blind primitive as compared to the imaginative monster. Similarly, Poe’s fanciful balloon stories explore the potential of the human imagination. While, Redon’s lithograph visualizes the schism between imagination and observation. His burden is to carry those who cannot see (or perhaps are too lazy to look) into the heavens and the INFINITE. The balloon drifts over the landscape carrying the primitive, un-motivated and thoughtless head while the giant-eye gazes into the INFINITE realm of faith.

<sup>29</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>30</sup> See Redon, *To Myself*, p 45: “But the painter always has an eye, an eye that sees”.

<sup>31</sup> Druick and Zegers, “Taking Wing, 1870-1878”, p 113.

***Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenór apparaît****Before the black Sun of MELANCHOLY, Lenore appears*

Poe's poetry and prose analytically elucidates his interest in the melancholic temperament of man, especially his own melancholy. In his famous poem "The Raven" (1845),<sup>32</sup> Poe probes the depths of human sorrow. Primarily, the poem deals with a lover's loss of his beautiful, virginal woman. Redon's second lithograph in *A Edgar Poë, Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenór apparaît* [fig.2.5] translates the sense of grief in Poe's "The Raven" from poetry to visual symbolism. André Mellerio's notes indicate that *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenór apparaît* is a "dessin antérieur" ["earlier illustration"]<sup>33</sup>. It is possible that the illustration that Mellerio refers to is a *noir* made the same year as the album's publication entitled *Lenore* [fig.2.6]. Both images visually quote aspects from Poe's poem "The Raven" while neither image directly refers to a particular scene or moment within the famous poem. Undoubtedly, Redon understood the mood of Poe's poem yet, when he created *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenór apparaît*, he chose to evoke the mood instead of invoke a moment specific to the text. Both images masterly conjure the sorrow Poe sonorously reiterates throughout "The Raven".

The charcoal drawing, *Lenore*, pictures the lover's Lenore standing amongst trees. The composition possesses negative space shaped like a U. Redon relies on the blank

<sup>32</sup> Poe joined the staff of New York city's *Evening Mirror* in October 1844. "The Raven" was published in the magazine in January, 1845 and was an immediate critical success.

<sup>33</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

paper to accentuate the dark tree-forms, which he made by blending charcoal with black chalk. The negative, blank space produces a mystical aura around the figure, bestowing upon her ghostly characteristics. Her figure is traced with dark contour lines that specify the boundaries of her form. The variation of blackness, between charcoal and chalk, isolate her figure while, also, suggesting transparency. Redon subtly utilizes both charcoal and paper to project the impression that Lenore is an apparition. She materializes, summoned forth from her eternal slumber. The heavy contours outlining her shape grant her an unequivocal classicism. Lenore, for both Redon and Poe, is the embodiment of pure beauty. At her feet, Redon places a raven. Unlike Lenore, whose head hangs in sorrow, the raven thrusts his head and beak up into the U-shaped negative space. The malevolence of the raven is emphasized through Redon's use of black chalk. The charcoal, overlaid with chalk, creates a sooty diabolic black. The raven's penetration into the white aura threatens Lenore's classical figure. Redon employs the U-like light to focus the viewer's gaze from the virginal Lenore to the virulent raven. The *noir*, *Lenore*, evokes the unbearable silence caused by the death of a truly beautiful woman.

### **Poe and his Lost Love, Lenore**

The intrusion of the raven in Poe's "The Raven" occurs while the lover hopelessly uses his books as a way of escaping his grief. The lover, the poem's narrator, is never defined with any distinctive physical characteristics. He is the universally ordinary man with nothing particular about him except for his interest in books. He is, perhaps, a student. He attempts to forget the passions of his body by pursuing the intellectual passions of his mind, "Eagerly, I wished the morrow; —vainly I had sought to borrow / From my books



surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—”.<sup>34</sup> His scholarly pursuits deaden his senses so that he no longer feels the pain of his loss. His environment is a surreal, dream-like atmosphere that makes any attempt to forget his beloved futile. A tempest rages outside the confines of the lover’s chamber pushing the bird to find refuge. The plausibility of the raven seeking solace in a quiet, calm room allows Poe the opportunity to mix an actual event with the unrealistic exchange that follows. When the lover hears tapping, he thinks it is only a late night visitor. His emotions consume his intellect. He feels a presence that thrills him “with fantastic terrors never felt before”.<sup>35</sup> And, when he opens the door, only to find the hallway empty, delusion and irrationality seize him. He hears the tapping again. He hopes his heart will calm as he opens the window.

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.  
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he,  
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.<sup>36</sup>

Poe intentionally has the raven land on the bust of Pallas to differentiate between the pure white marble Pallas and the black raven.

I made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage—it being understood that the bust was absolutely suggested by the bird—the bust of Pallas being chosen first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover, and secondly, for the sonorousness of the word, Pallas, itself.<sup>37</sup>

He uses the colour to visually distinguish the contradictions between the bird and the statue. Pallas, the Greek goddess of wisdom and protection is overwhelmed by the

<sup>34</sup> E.A. Poe, “The Raven”, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 943.

<sup>35</sup> Poe, “The Raven”, p 944.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p 944.

<sup>37</sup> E.A. Poe, “The Philosophy of Composition”, orig. published April 1846 in *Grahams Magazine*. *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, New York 1984, p 22.

raven's dark plumage. The bird of ill omen interferes with the mystical protection that Pallas performs from her position.

Throughout his interchange with the raven, Lenore is continually on the lover's mind. The chamber's familiarity acts as a constant reminder that she is dead: "But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er / *She* shall press, ah, nevermore!"<sup>38</sup> The lover takes the raven to be a sign from the underworld; he questions the bird about her eternal repose. But, he ends up torturing himself. It is the perversity of his actions that, like a drug, forces him to continue.

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! —prophet still, if bird or devil!  
By that heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels named Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."  
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."<sup>39</sup>

Poe grants the raven the power of speech. He adds madness to the lover's melancholy.

... in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem ... it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." ... immediately arose the idea of a non-reasoning creature capable of speech; and, very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superseded forthwith by a Raven, as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended tone.<sup>40</sup>

The lover understands that with every question, the raven's eternal response will be "Nevermore". The interrogation relies on this fact. His unyielding persistence brings about his own melancholic demise. His mind is entirely aware that it has lost control; yet, he cannot stop himself. In one last attempt, he lashes out at the raven, " "Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore! / Take thy beak from out my heart, and

<sup>38</sup> Poe, "The Raven", p 945.

<sup>39</sup> Poe, "The Raven", p 945. Italics are Poe's own emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", p 18.

take thy form from off my door!" / Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore." ".<sup>41</sup> But, the raven continues to perch upon the bust of Pallas, mocking the lover's sorrow as the raven's shadow encroaches over the lover's body. He resigns himself to melancholic madness,

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore!<sup>42</sup>

### Redon's Raven

Like Redon's 1882 noir, *Lenore*, *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE*, *Lenór apparaît* relies on the visual opposition of black and white to evoke the mood of Poe's "The Raven". *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE*, *Lenór apparaît* reiterates Poe's own juxtaposition of black and white. The colour relationship causes a dramatic conflict that parallels the visual discord between Pallas and the raven. For Poe, Pallas' whiteness symbolizes purity, while Redon's white imbues Lenore's face with glowing unadulterated innocence. When Poe has the raven land on the pure form of Pallas, its shadow pollutes the virginal colour. In *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE*, *Lenór apparaît* Redon orients the white Lenore within a symphony of black foreboding forms. Her chaste profile and veil fill the left of the frame while darkness saturates the remainder of the composition.

The figure of Lenore from *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE*, *Lenór apparaît* is more monumental and concrete than the elusive and shadowy *Lenore*. Redon

<sup>41</sup> Poe, "The Raven", p 945.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p 945-946.

meticulously defines her profile and bust, allowing her majestic proportions to arrest the viewer's attention. Her head and veil dominate much of the composition. Her cloak pops out of the picture through its variety of geometric patterns. Redon textures the long veil using an overabundance of cross-hatching; its grayish sketchy colour makes her cap and face stand out. The complex geometric cloak along with her shiny black hair frames her profile. He renders her countenance grave and thoughtful, "Le profil pensif d'une femme" ["The thoughtful profile of a woman"].<sup>43</sup> Her white head casts a dark shadow below her chin, obscuring the outline of her neck. This causes her head to seemingly float within the composition; the only link to her body is the veil's attachment to the cloak. Her thin, frowning lips and large eye reveal the presence of both sorrow and beauty. The pupil of the eye is dilated; the iris flickers with specks of light that give the whole eye a glossy, sad expression. Her dark, arching eyebrow casts a black shadow directly above her pupil, which intensifies her gaze. The gaze is profoundly sombre and radiant while her head and jaw are perfectly level with the frame of the composition. It is only the eye that looks up. Redon silences her ears with her veil. He cloaks her hands. He shuts her mouth. She is capable only of sight and thought.

*Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenór apparaît* symbolizes the lover's radiant maiden of "The Raven". Poe wanted to create a pure, honest love whose universality would excite the "sensitive soul to tears".<sup>44</sup> Redon's majestic Lenore represents pure eternal beauty. Her figure reproduces Poe's notion that the most poetic of

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<sup>43</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII, Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>44</sup> Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", p 17.

subjects is "the death ... of a beautiful woman".<sup>45</sup> The way her body is oriented within the composition makes it seem as if she has magically appeared within the confines of the lithograph. She comes from the nether world. Perhaps her elevated gaze is entranced by something coming from the other side of the "Plutonian shore".<sup>46</sup> Lenore is a shrouded, veiled woman with geometric patterns that reference Byzantine representations of the Madonna. Lenore's purity symbolizes the immaculate Mary. Both represent the universal beauty, the unadulterated beauty of an adolescent. Lenore is physically untouched and, yet, emotionally overcome with sorrow. She knows the pain of death.

The environment surrounding Lenore undulates with varying geometric forms. Looming before her figure is a textured greyish mass; the sketchy contours delineate the grey object from the blackness. Perhaps the hard rough lines combined with feathery contours allude to a raven's wing. However, besides this, the puzzling shape defies any particular classification. Unlike the *noir*, there is no representation of a raven in the lithograph. Rather than defining any particular thing, the grey mass symbolizes the darkness of uncertainty. Redon balances the composition by mirroring the same greyish mass that echoes behind the figure of Lenore. These obtrusive grey forms effectively either open or close around her; they flank her image. They evoke both the perverse self-torture of the lover while also expressing the raven's repetitive speech "Nevermore". Unlike the *noir*, where Lenore's materialization is transparently rendered, *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE*, Lenore apparaît prominently places her as the visual lead to the lithograph. The viewer's eyes are immediately drawn to her own large eye, which then leads up to the top right corner of the lithograph and over two arching parallel

<sup>45</sup> Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", p 19.

<sup>46</sup> Poe, "The Raven", p 944.

shapes. At the end of the arched black and white shapes is the other solid grey mass that orients the viewer's eyes back to Lenore. Mellerio proposes that these two grey forms are "deux montagnes" ["two mountains"].<sup>47</sup> They split like scissors forming an inverted triangle, revealing two rounded shapes, one black, the other, white, "où l'on voit un astre noir, bordé d'une zone lumineuse" ["where one sees a black star, edged with a luminous zone"].<sup>48</sup>

Redon explains Mellerio's ambiguous 'astre noir' [black star] with 'zone lumineuse' [luminescent zone] through his title which captions the lithograph: *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenore apparaît*, which can be translated into English as *Before the black Sun of MELANCHOLY, Lenore appears*. If taken literally, Mellerio's 'astre noir' [black star] is called in the caption 'le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE' [the black Sun of MELANCHOLY]. He visually expresses the existence of a luminescent zone that extends towards the top border of the composition while also encircling the black star or Sun. The black Sun has rays, dark black lines that encroach upon the luminescent border. Mellerio's interpretation relies on the black sun having a light aura. However, the black sun may not have a border. Instead, it eclipses an independent white Sun or star. Poe's "The Raven" ends with the raven's shadow falling over the still, melancholic body of the lover. His lost love, Lenore, is gone forever both in life and in death. There is only the darkness of the raven which subverts the personal experience of loss.

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<sup>47</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



Poe's lover submits to despair and darkness revealing human kind's capacity for deep sorrow. Instead of picturing the moment of the full eclipse of the black Sun, Redon shows a partial eclipse that reveals both darkness and light. There is no closure; the resolution is only uncertainty and doubt. Kilbansky, Panofsky, and Saxl in their study, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, associate that the melancholic temperament of man results from too many nocturnal intellectual pursuits. Poe's lover attempted to overcome the loss of Lenore through books, resigning himself to a physical half-light defined as "the uncanny twilight of the mind, which can neither cast its thoughts away into darkness nor 'bring them to light'."<sup>49</sup> The lithograph pictures the intellectual 'twilight' through visually juxtaposing black and white celestial forms. He depicts the moment when reason is put in shadow and man becomes monster. The lithograph's darkest point in the composition is the black Sun, intensified through the contrast with Lenore's pallid face. Her white figure opposes the threatening, melancholic sun. Her proximity to such pervasive darkness suggests the presence of the Virgin at Golgotha: "At noon darkness came over the whole land"<sup>50</sup> when there was "an eclipse of the sun".<sup>51</sup>

The prominence of sorrow figures in both Poe's "The Raven" and Redon's *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenór apparaît*. The pure face of Lenore surrounded by a variety of black foreboding forms illustrates the despair felt by the narrator in Poe's "The Raven". Redon's Lenore, whose countenance echoes her lover's despair and self-torture, represents universal beauty and tragedy. His rendering of her pale innocence

<sup>49</sup> R. Kilbansky, E. Panofsky and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, London 1964, p 320.

<sup>50</sup> Mark 15: 33. Catholic World Press, *The New America Bible*, Grand Rapids 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Luke 23: 44-45. Catholic World Press, *The New America Bible*, Grand Rapids 1997.

before the black Sun of MELANCHOLY portrays the unsatisfied lover in "The Raven". The eye motif, manifest in the almond shaped singular eye, acknowledges a variety of emotional experiences. However, it also defines the action of the lithograph. The eye, sad and luminescent, observes the eclipse of the sun from its boundary between geometric, obtrusive forms. Lenore is a captive woman. She is a hostage to the darkness of death and a witness to the suffering of life. Her beauty and grief evoke the sorrow of Poe's "The Raven".

*Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE**A Mask sounds the FUNERAL KNELL*

Poe asserted that life is a succession of events, some being good while others are evil, for “out of joy is sorrow born”.<sup>52</sup> His macabre and grotesque subject matter primarily deals with the theme of death. Redon’s third lithograph *Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE* [fig.2.7] blends his own imaginary monumental creations with Poe’s death-obsessed prose. The resulting image is a composition that seems almost devoid of any specific story associated with Poe. Yet, the overarching mood of the lithograph signifies Redon’s appropriation of Poe’s intense environments as a way of exploring his own macabre emotions. The relation of these two artists (in this lithograph) depends on each using the thematic element of time. Time is either temporal or spiritual in that it documents the passing of the hours, days or years while also signaling the proverbial end of an era or persona. Redon visualizes time as a bell which is almost white in comparison to the darkness that envelops the rest of the composition. The contrast of black with white subtly connects Redon’s imagination with Poe’s own ubiquitous dwellings on morbidity. Redon uses black as a technical device to explore the emotional depth allowed by “the most essential colour...[it] should be respected. Nothing prostitutes it...it is the agent of the spirit”.<sup>53</sup> The element of time, combined with the juxtaposition of black and white enables Redon to create a composition that is based both on actual materials surrounded by fantastic elements taken from his imagination.

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<sup>52</sup> E.A. Poe, “Berenice”, p 643.

<sup>53</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 103.

## The FUNERAL KNELL

*Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE* portrays three fundamental elements: a large bell, a spinal column with a mask-like head, and a cord held by skeletal hands. The bell or, as Redon titles it, *GLAS FUNÉBRE* [FUNERAL KNELL], hangs from between two barely discernible beams. It introduces the ‘real’ element of time in that it represents an actual object that is used to signify the passing of moments. The lightly illuminated outline of a nut and bolt shows how the bell is seemingly held to the beams. Redon indicates the beams’ placement amidst the dark belfry by highlighting two parallel grey-white horizontal lines. The bell swings. Its elliptical mouth tilts towards the similarly elliptical cord. The bell looks textured, as if Redon placed his transfer paper<sup>54</sup> over a grainy surface in order to achieve a more tactile finish. He shades the bell, thereby making it three-dimensional. It emerges out of shadow becoming lighter and then disappearing, blending into the black setting. A three-dimensionally rendered clapper hangs from the mouth of the bell. Its position, as it swings upwards with the bell’s momentum, visually communicates that the bell is in movement. Redon gives dynamism to the bell by surrounding the areas beneath the mouth and over the lip of the bell with many thin lines.

The clapper of the bell nears the lip but it does not touch it. There is no contact; therefore, there is no noise. Mellerio assumes that the thin, sketchy lines around the bell symbolize the resonance of sound, “le battant fait jaillir les ondes sonores sous forme de scintillements lumineux” [“the clapper of which makes sound waves flow in the form of

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<sup>54</sup> Redon often used transfer paper rather than working directly on the lithographic stone. For additional information see chapter two “Courting the Stone: Redon’s Lithographic Techniques”, in T. Gott, *The Enchanted Stone*.

luminous sparks”].<sup>55</sup> This interpretation depends on the supposition that the bell and clapper have already connected. For Mellerio, the lines around the bell are visual manifestations of sound. The validity of his interpretation trusts the presumption that Redon draws sound as well as movement. Redon’s caption for the lithograph, *Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE* [*A mask sounds a FUNERAL KNELL*] implies intent, but not finality. Specifically, the bell, when rung, makes a partial noise that continues to resonate until dissolution. But, the clapper has not connected with the body of the bell. The sketchy lines do not resonate out like a drop of water ripples. Rather, the lines are random marks made directly on the stone. Perhaps Redon indicates both sound and movement because, without the bell’s momentum, there is no noise.

Directly below the clapper of the bell is a skeletal head. This is the character that Redon’s caption calls ‘*un masque*’ [‘a mask’]. The head precariously balances atop a spinal column which rises out of the bottom frame of the composition. The skeletal spinal column is starkly white as is the skull-like head. Redon severs the mask’s head directly below the nose. He also removes the jaw, dispensing with one of the five senses: taste. The detachment of the jaw from the skull consequently eliminates the mouth and, with it, the ability to speak. The mask’s face contains a nose and two eyes with no particular individualistic attributes that would add ornamentation or decoration. It is not the mask from a masquerade ball but, rather, a caricatured skull. The mask represents a monster of what once may have been human. The orientation of the eyes’ gaze questions the mask’s function in relation to the bell. The eyes do not look at the bell or at the cord; instead they

<sup>55</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

look past the bell. Redon skews the directional gaze of the eyes illustrating that, while the mask does have the sense of sight, it has been denied and altered.

Ironically, the head also lacks the sense of sound; a sense needed to discern the number of times the bell is rung. Redon does not draw the mask with ears. If he did, the mask would be able to count the chimes of the bell. However, ears are not necessary in order to count. If the mask's eyes were oriented towards the bell and hammer, it could watch the amount of times the clapper hits the bell. But the eyes do not look at the clapper or the bell. They look beyond into the darkness of the belfry. Redon negates both sight and sound visualizing the idea that death is not witnessed by the dead person's senses. Indeed, the dead cannot hear funeral bells nor can they see a bell chime. Redon's lithograph presents a scenario where sensorial experience is eliminated. The only sense somewhat connected with the bell is touch. The cord, held by two skeletal hands, is made up from a long interwoven rope. It originates at the bottom of the beam on the right-hand side of the composition. At the rope's base, the two emaciated hands pull the cord. Assuming that the cord is connected to the bell—although, in no place on the composition is this clearly defined—Redon visually employs the sense of touch to associate the bell with a body. However, the hands are removed from the skeletal vertebrae of the mask. They too are disconnected. Thus, while Redon depicts touch, he also refutes it by separating the hands from the body of the masque.

### **The Tolling of Poe**

The visual disassociation of the senses in *Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE* illustrates many characters from Poe's stories that are infatuated with the macabre.



Alternately, these characters are, in many instances, physically detached from death's grip. The imagery of the bell, swinging yet making no sound, illustrates that the death toll falls on deaf ears. The bell signifies the passage of time, which is realized in a truly dark and devilish way in two of Poe's stories. The first story, "The Devil in the Belfry"<sup>56</sup> uses the bell in order to announce the death of a way of life. Poe sets the scene in the fictitious Dutch borough of Vondervotteimittiss, a town of "indefinite definiteness"<sup>57</sup> that is dictated by the ticking of the clock. The borough is comprised of sixty identical houses; each house contains a "small garden ... with a circular path, a sun-dial, and twenty-four cabbages".<sup>58</sup> The décor, identical both on the exterior and in the interior, uses the repeated motifs of the clock and cabbage. Poe never explains the significance of the cabbage. But, he states that on every wooden surface "wherever they find room for the chisel"<sup>59</sup> there is a clock. Each town's person carries a clock in his/her right hand; every animal has a clock fixed to its tail making it "handsome".<sup>60</sup> The dictation of each tick-tock of the clock gives the town a sense of order and purpose. Even the most respected inhabitant among the people of the town is associated with the clock; he is the belfry-man. Poe uses repetition, particularly the noise of the clock, to give the story a strict sense of order. The chimes regulate the actions of the unalterable town. The towns' people fear

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<sup>56</sup> The exact date of "The Devil in the Belfry" is unknown. Poe historians believe that the story changed names often and that it may have been one of a series of stories included in Poe's "Tales of the Folio Club", which he had hoped to publish in as a book in 1832-1833.

<sup>57</sup> Poe, "The Devil in the Belfry", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 736.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p 737.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p 737.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p 738.

change as “no good can come from over the hills”<sup>61</sup>. But one day at “only three minutes to noon” a “diminutive foreign-looking man”<sup>62</sup> appeared over the hill.

The foreign man, dressed in black and carrying a fiddle and a snuffbox, seems the stereotypical picture of the devil. At only half a minute to noon, this foreigner barges into the belfry’s interior and forever silences the belfry-man. The town’s people, who had gathered below to watch the tolling of the bell, do nothing to avenge the death of the innocent belfry man because the movements of the clock rigidly order them. At only half a second to noon, each town’s person begins counting the strokes of the bell.

“Twelve!” said the bell.

“Un dvelt it iss!” said all the little old gentlemen, putting up their watches. But the big bell had not done with them yet.

“Thirteen!” said he.<sup>63</sup>

The bell continues to chime after the stroke of thirteen. The town loses control, the animals run in circles disrupting the order of the gardens, and “the clocks carved upon the furniture took to dancing as if bewitched”.<sup>64</sup> The devil pronounces the beginning of the thirteenth hour instigating the town’s ruin.

Poe’s “Masque of the Red Death” (1841-1842) incorporates both the bell and time as signifiers of death. In an attempt to escape the Red Death (the plague), Prince Prospero quarantines himself along with one thousand friends from his province within the private confines of his castle. He believed that “it was folly to grieve, or to think”<sup>65</sup> regarding the imminent death caused by the Red Death. As a celebration of continuing to elude the grasp of the plague, the Prince decides to throw a masquerade ball in seven decadently

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p 739.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p 739.

<sup>63</sup> Poe, “The Devil in the Belfry”, p 741. Italics are Poe’s emphasis.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p 741.

<sup>65</sup> Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death”, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 269.

decorated rooms. Relying on his “love of the *bizarre*”,<sup>66</sup> the Prince blends eccentric and grotesque elements together. In particular, within the seventh apartment (the black chamber) he places a giant ebony clock.

It's pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and their was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation.<sup>67</sup>

The party continued on towards midnight when, at length, many noticed an addition to the group. Dressed as though fresh from the grave, a shadow walked “tall and gaunt”<sup>68</sup> through the seven rooms. The newcomer offended the Prince simply by his presence because he assumed “the type of the Red Death”.<sup>69</sup> The Prince confronts his new masked guest by verbally assaulting him. Calmly, the shadowy figure walks into the seventh room where the ebony clock stood. Followed by the grief stricken Prince, he reaches out and touches the concealed figure and, in doing so, dies. The masked shadow is the Red Death in disguise, “untenanted by any tangible form”, symbolizing the inevitability of death when “Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all”.<sup>70</sup>

Redon created a *noir* based on Poe's “The Masque of the Red Death” one year after the publication of *A Edgar Poë*. The image, aptly titled *The Masque of the Red Death* [fig. 2.8] (1883) incorporates the extreme decadent behavior with a fantastically

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p 269. Italics are Poe's emphasis.

<sup>67</sup> Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death”, p 269.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p 272.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p 272.

rendered interior. The *noir* depicts five figures that cascade out of the black door-like opening in the upper-right corner. The last figure (the figure closest to the door) has a hooked, beak-like nose and large round eyes. His face recalls the masks worn during the Italian *Carnivale* [Carnival]. A broad-rimmed hat sits upon his ghostly head, which does nothing to cast a shadow or darkness upon his face. Another figure stands beside him with his large nose that casts a mustache-like shadow over his face. The head, on which rests a white, round hat, appears human. There are no mask-like distortions to his face. Upon his head sits a white, round hat. As opposed to the figure behind him, he crosses his greyish body with his arm over his breast. The third figure holds his large skeletal head upright. His face is in a grimace with its down turned mouth reflecting the angry and sorrowful eyes. His head appears to float upon a shaded and costumed body. The fourth figure stands directly before the three; he is part human, part shadow. Perhaps the fifth figure, which is the front figure regarded as Prince Prospero, casts the shadow that obscures the fourth figure's face and left portion of his body from view. This fourth figure symbolizes death. He is the disguised Red Death whose inevitable intrusion kills Prospero and his guests. Prospero's figure stands in an arrogant, statuesque pose. His hand is propped on his hip, while the other hand clutches the hilt of a sword. His eyes look out of the composition with a willful gaze. His face, covered in a skeletal yet animistic mask, is surrounded by an aura of black, mane-like lines. Death surrounds him. Directly opposite Prospero, Redon places the famous ebony clock. The face of the clock stands on a black, rectangular box in which a pendulum is barely discernible. Devoid of all numbers except the Roman numeral twelve, Redon emphasizes the flight of death by

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p 273.

turning one of the hands of the clock into a feather, or wing. Time flies. Death comes swiftly.

*The Masque of the Red Death* is set in an environment whose architectural setting reiterates the introductory image [fig. 1.1a] for *A Edgar Poë*. A black door, with a three-dimensional column, is truncated by an oversized wheel-clock. The *noir*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, and the lithograph, *Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE*, are visually dissimilar. However, both rely on the bell or clock to complete Poe's theme of the inevitability of death. The death bell of *Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE* evokes themes present in both of Poe's stories, "The Devil in the Belfry" and "The Masque of the Red Death". Each contains characters that try to regulate their lives within strict confines. They structure their lives without any deviation or fleeing from the impending doom of Death, in an attempt to postpone fate. In the lithograph, Redon freezes the bell of *Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE*; he prevents the bell from ringing. The mask lacks ears, his hands hold an elliptical and detached cord, and his eyes look past the bell. This is an image of death. He pictures a monstrous human, a decomposed figure made from a conglomeration of skeletal parts that *sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE* [sounds the FUNERAL KNELL]. Like the devil from "The Devil in the Belfry", Redon's mask rings in the dawning of the Thirteenth hour, the hour after life and the beginning of death.

***A l'horizon, l'ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard interrogateur***

*On the horizon the angel of CERTITUDE, and in the somber heaven a questioning eye*

*A l'horizon, l'ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard interrogateur* [fig.2.9] furthers Redon's visual exploration into the potential of blackness and melancholy. The lithograph is a composition full of black shapes that overlap each other. The image relies on the colour white to orient the viewer's eyes over the black sea and within the dark sky. White light behaves like a beacon that illuminates the blackness, pinpointing particular themes for contemplation. A variety of different forms emerge out of geometric shapes. However, the image harbours an overwhelming sense of calm and silence. The dark forms appear sad and frozen, only the eyes which actively gaze out of their confines face the viewer. An assortment of little black and white eyes penetrates the composition, personalizing the viewing experience.

This is not the first image to contain a pervasive sense of the melancholic. Already, in *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE*, Lenór apparaît Redon juxtaposed black and white suns portraying the *le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE* [the black Sun of Melancholy]. He depicted the moment when darkness overwhelms light. In art history, the semiotics of Melancholy varies. 'Scientifically', melancholy is thought to be an imbalance amongst the four humours, or temperaments. Albrecht Dürer's famous etching entitled *Melencolia I* [fig.2.10] expound on the temperaments. At the same time, Dürer's image develops (visually) the saturnine qualities also associated with the dark sorrow.



The mental condition of Melancholy was seen as fundamental to the modern man (particularly Symbolist and Decadent artists of the nineteenth-century), “La grandeur de l’homme est grande en ce qu’il se connoist misérable” [“The greatness of man is great in that he knows his own misery”].<sup>71</sup> This temperament held dominion over such artists as Baudelaire and Poe. It is as if the melancholic disposition was not only an affliction caused by an imbalance but, also, a normal attribute to their personalities which was “reflective, intellectual, playful and dellusional”.<sup>72</sup> The melancholic relationship between Redon and Poe is expressed in their work. Perverse, psychological images permeate their melancholic musings and bizarre images emerge out of the darkest depths of the imagination. While Redon never suffered from the fluctuation between depression and manic mood states, the album *A Edgar Poë* reflects his individual suffering. He attempted to transcend his ‘melencolia’ by creating a fictitious imagination which was the result of his melancholic temperament. *A l’horizon, l’ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard intérogateur* undulates with the (personal) interrogative gaze of the melancholic temperament. The ‘*regard intérogateur*’ [‘*sombre gaze*’] is trapped in the white moon-like sphere hovering above a small human figure. The cherubic form is revealed through a triangular opening. Redon utilizes forms expressive of the semiotics of Melancholy to a universalizing effect. In particular, he draws on Dürer’s *Melencolia I* and Saturn to make *A l’horizon, l’ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard intérogateur* a composition that encapsulates the blackness of Melancholy and the darkness of Poe.

<sup>71</sup> B. Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensées*, trans. H.F. Stewart, D.D., London 1950, p 84-85.

<sup>72</sup> *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. J. Radden, New York 2000, pp 8-10.

## Melancholy

Redon states that his fourth lithograph is indebted to Dürer's *Melencolia I*,<sup>73</sup> he comments on its artistic merit:

... I smilingly recall having formerly made, just like Dürer, an angel of certitudes; he smiles, a little old man, in a ray of light which dominates a black sky, where I put a questioning glance.<sup>74</sup>

Redon's brief text inextricably links his lithographic image from *A Edgar Poë* with Dürer's etching. *Melencolia I* deals with the inherent contradictions between work and rest. It portrays a cherub juxtaposed with the feminine personification of Melancholy. Unlike Melancholy herself, who sits in lethargic contemplation with her "cheek resting on one hand",<sup>75</sup> the cherub holds a pen and appears to work. He is absorbed by his intellectual activity; work contents him. He is "a being that has only just learnt the contentment of activity, even when unproductive; and does not yet know the torment of thought".<sup>76</sup> In comparison, Melancholy, blankly and without definition, gazes away from her studies. She is unproductive. She allows the tools for intellectual experimentation to sit untouched at her feet the "cosmos of clearly ranged and purposefully employed tools [is now] a chaos of unused things; their casual distribution reflects a psychological unconcern".<sup>77</sup> Dürer hides her "dark face"<sup>78</sup> behind her clenched fist. The dark countenance is not a description of her actual physiognomy. Rather, it enables Dürer the

<sup>73</sup> For a detailed analysis of Saturn, Melancholy and in particular, Dürer's *Melencolia I* see Kilbansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*.

<sup>74</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 91. Redon's statement is his own recollection of a "verbal commentary on Dürer's *Melancholia* by Elémir Bourges", in *To Myself*, p 91.

<sup>75</sup> Kilbansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p 285.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p 321.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p 317.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p 319.

ability to transform her face from a stereotypical female to a universal expression. Her entire composure represents a tired, intellectually-withered woman who is the embodiment of a "state of mind".<sup>79</sup> Dürer's woman is the allegorical representation of Melancholy. She symbolizes the depressed, anxious genius that knows the pinnacle of intellectual thought as well as the pains resulting from failure. The only light that illuminates her shadowy physique is the "glow of [a] heavenly phenomena, which cause[s] the sea in the background to glow with phosphorescence, while the foreground seems to be lit by a moon standing high in the sky and casting deep shadows".<sup>80</sup> Dürer represents the "twilight"<sup>81</sup> because melancholic temperament stems from nocturnal intellectual activity. He places the moon above Melancholy as a symbol of time, while also denoting "the uncanny twilight of a mind, which can neither cast its thoughts away into the darkness nor 'bring them to light'".<sup>82</sup>

Redon blends various elements from Dürer's *Melencolia I* in the production of *A l'horizon, l'ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard interrogateur* incorporating the moon, the personification of Melancholy and an assortment of saturnine qualities in the composition. The colour black signifies the fourth humour (black bile) as well as the Greek god Kronos. It noticeably overwhelms the image as black geometric shapes obstruct and reveal various forms. Almost two-thirds of the entire image is the colour black. A large rhombus shape, synonymous with the sky, possesses a white sphere symbolic of the moon. Contained in the circular boundary is an eye. Redon floats an aura of abstract light over the moon-eye shape; the sky is speckled with tiny white dots

<sup>79</sup> Kilbansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p 320.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p 320.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p 320.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p 320.

indicating stars. Penny Florence's book *Mallarmé, Manet and Redon: Visual and Aural Signs and the Generation of Meaning* suggests the existence of visual signifiers in Redon's work. She analyzes the celestial, melancholic imagery in Redon's fourth lithograph of *A Edgar Poë*:

The angel...inhabits a segmented space which makes the sky appear like a flat plane or thin wall. The eye of the 'regard sombre' is subject to a perceptual oscillation according to the spectator's sense making activity. If 'moon' is assigned as a signified, it appears as a part of the sphere formed by its light background, and floats before the dark sky. If, however, 'detail of a face' is supplied, it recedes behind the sky—in this way all the elements may be inverted. If a message is assumed, to whom is it addressed?—to Poe, to the angel, or to the spectator? Since the participants in the event are unclear, the status of the message is brought into question, and turned inwards. The speaking subject subsumes its surrounding in a reciprocal dissolution and reconstruction.<sup>83</sup>

Florence's investigation introduces the idea that the eye is perceived as either being contained within the moon, or peeking through a hole in the sky. The eye, which resembles a human eye, is unadorned with eyelashes or framed with a sculpted eyebrow. If the eye is thought to 'peek' through, then it is apparently a part of a face. If Redon had accentuated the corner of the eye with a tear duct, it would be more discernible as to which eye is depicted. Instead, he draws a 'bag' like shadow beneath the eye which begins under the more pointed side of the elliptical shape. This would suggest that the eye portrayed is the right eye.

More importantly though than the differentiation between the right or left eye is the eye's orientation. Its gaze seems at once abstracted and, then, concentrated as it looks beyond the frame of the composition. The look is not intense to the point of assaulting the viewer. Rather, it pauses in relaxed contemplation similar to *Melancholy* from Dürer's

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<sup>83</sup> P. Florence, *Mallarmé, Manet and Redon: Visual and Aural Signs and the Generation of Meaning*, Cambridge 1986, pp 57-58.

*Melencolia I*. Regardless, the eye does maintain a strength that dwells deep within the intellectual twilight. Florence's explanation firmly establishes that the eye's gaze resides in two interpretations. Here, the first interpretation posits that the eye is enclosed within the moon-like form; Redon grants the moon-eye object with sensorial powers. The supposed 'man in the moon' can see. This objectifies the moon-eye combination as one unified form. The second interpretation states that, if the eye peeks through the hole in the night sky, Redon limits the sense of sight by relegating it to a sort of tunnel vision. Its vision is obstructed and limited by outside factors that dictate what it perceives. The title of the composition calls the moon-like sphere '*un regard interrogeur*' [*a questioning eye*], which is further explained in *A Soi-même* as "a ray of light which dominates a black sky ... I put a questioning glance".<sup>84</sup> Redon's explanation adds mystery to an already ambiguous form. While it seems as though the gaze is personal, it looks out into the realm of the viewer actively beseeching an answer. The eye is not direct, because it is a 'questioning' eye picturing the gaze as one that is unspecified.

The black sombre sky terminates revealing a triangular space that contains a winged child. Mellerio defines this space as follows:

on y aperçoit la tête et le buste d'un enfant vu de trois quarts avec une petite aile à l'épaule et faisant un geste de la main.

[one sees the head and the chest / torso of a child viewed in three-quarters with a little wing on its shoulder, making a gesture with its hand.]<sup>85</sup>

Dürer's etching depicted both the idle Melancholy and the productive cherub. In comparison, Redon's lithograph portrays a child, an adolescent cherubic youth. The

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<sup>84</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 91.

<sup>85</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.



child's face is etched with simple, sculptural features. His eyes, ears, nose and mouth grant him the sensorial powers of sight, sound, smell and taste<sup>86</sup>. His torso turns in three-quarter profile, tilting his right shoulder forward towards the viewer while the left is obstructed by shadow. He is neither idle, nor productive. The eyes slyly look out from the corners. His side-glance critically peers out from the triangular confines. Redon's caption calls this figure *l'ange des CERTITUDES* [*the angel of CERTITUDE*]. The contemplative eyes mimic the eye within the moon-like form; they too have *un regard interrogateur* [*questioning glance*]. Both eye-figures denote skepticism while also engaging the viewer. The relatively compact setting draws the viewer's gaze. The child's hand is separate from the rest of its body. It emerges out of the horizon, frozen in a position that seemingly makes a slight gesture. Redon crowns the head with laurels awarding the figure with a festive garland of intellectual achievement. This child encapsulates Dürer's allegorical scene, incorporating both the cherub and Melancholy. Redon's adolescent youthful cherub's torso moves his right shoulder forward. His left is obstructed from view by the penetrating blackness of the background. This cherub is not idle, nor productive. Simply, sculptural facial features adorn his head, which turns with the chest in three-quarter profile. The eyes of the cherub look out of the corner of his eyes. He is *l'ange des CERTITUDES* [*the angel of CERTITUDE*], yet his gaze denotes skepticism. Oddly, Redon calls the cherubic child a "little old man"<sup>87</sup> in his journal *A Soi-même*, disputing Mellerio's notes which have named this figure the 'child'. Redon's

<sup>86</sup> Taste is one of the six senses, I would also like to remind the reader that the mouth is also capable of speech. While speech is not considered a sensation, every time I refer to 'taste' I also refer to the mouth's capacity to make both guttural noises (in the case of the primitive) and words (the ability to make dialogue with another being).

<sup>87</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 91.



statement does not necessarily reflect the age of this figure. Rather, it denotes the figures intellectual wisdom similar to the allegorical personification of Melancholy. This little, old man (child) personifies the strain of scholarly pursuits, indicating the assumption that *l'ange des CERTITUDES* [*the angel of CERTITUDE*] is enlightened.

Beneath the dark sky and cherubic child, Redon fills the rest of the composition with a horizontal band of black undulating lines. The foreground seascape “au premier plan, en eau sombre” [“in the foreground, is dark water”]<sup>88</sup> places a definitive association between Redon and the saturnine attributes of Melancholy. As indicated earlier, these dark waters correspond with the Greek god Kronos, a god with inherent contradictions. Kronos’ nature is “dual...not only with regard to his effects on the outer world, but with regard to his own—as it were, personal—destiny”.<sup>89</sup> After being dethroned, he lives at the “uttermost end of land and sea”<sup>90</sup> he was “exiled beneath the earth and the flood of the seas”.<sup>91</sup> This damnation of the god to the underworld of the earth and sea imbues the composition with melancholic silence. The overall mood stems from the focused, contemplative eyes looking out of the image. They are bound by geometric shapes that inhibit them. However, the abundance of geometric forms builds the composition with architectural stability. Redon punctuates his image with an assortment of imaginative figures taken from Dürer’s own *Melencolia I*.

<sup>88</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>89</sup> Kilbansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p 134.

<sup>90</sup> *Iliad*, VIII, 479, in *Ibid.*, p 134.

<sup>91</sup> *Iliad*, XIV, 204, in *Ibid.*, p 134.

## Melancholic Silence

In 1868, fourteen years prior to the publication of *A Edgar Poë*, Redon made a graphite drawing “which originally bore the inscription ‘desolation’ on a rock [and] was also inscribed *Silence (Edgar Poe)*”<sup>92</sup>[fig.2.11]. His image recounts Poe’s story titled “Silence—A Fable” (date unknown). It shows a rock jutting out into the sea and upward towards the black sky. The only light is a crescent moon streaked by dark clouds. The black sky and sea surround the white terrain. Poe’s “Silence—A Fable” deals with a quiet so pervasive that terror envelops the mind, body and soul. He relates a tale where a man undergoes a melancholic transformation from thoughtful depression to inexpressible fear. In “Silence—A Fable”, a perverse Demon synonymous with the Devil, addresses the reader. He describes the anxious mood rising from the vast desolate landscape in the “dreary region [of] Libya”.<sup>93</sup> He asks his audience to “Listen”, stating that “by the borders of the river Zaire...there is [no] quiet...[no] silence”.<sup>94</sup> The natural environment surrounding the river seems like a fantastic jungle with vegetation: “gigantic water-lilies”, rain that “fell; and falling, it was rain, but having fallen, it was blood”, and tributary rivers whose “sickly hue...palpitate forever...with a tumultuous and convulsive motion”.<sup>95</sup> There is “no wind throughout the heaven”<sup>96</sup> that can agitate them, instead “there is an indistinct murmur which cometh out from among them...And they sigh one unto the other”.<sup>97</sup> Redon’s *Silence (Edgar Poe)* visualizes Poe’s vivid setting with lilies floating

<sup>92</sup> F. Leeman, “The Image and the Text”, in D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers (eds), *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams 1840-1916*, exh. cat., The Art Institute of Chicago 1994, p 183.

<sup>93</sup> Poe, “Silence—A Fable”, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 459.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p 459.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p 459.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p 459.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p 459.

on top of the water. Their roots reach beneath the surface. He does not depict the rain. However, Redon hints at it by portraying ominous black clouds that break over the crescent moon. The vegetation is motionless. All in the graphite sketch, as in the story, is quiet.

Odd that amidst this quiet, static environment, no solace can be found. Poe's moon, which breaks through the "thin ghastly mist"<sup>98</sup> spotlights a grey, tall rock where upon its form "were characters engraven...the characters were DESOLATION".<sup>99</sup> A silhouetted man stands upon the rock seeking, as it seems to the Demon, "a longing after solitude".<sup>100</sup> Yet, the Demon watches as the man "trembled in the solitude".<sup>101</sup> After much irritation at the man's desire for solitude and, yet fear of it, the Demon calls forth nature. Behemoth animals and torrential rain torment the man. Yet, the demon realizes that which instills the deepest fear in man is solitude brought by utter quiet. He hushes nature with the "curse of *silence*".<sup>102</sup> The silhouetted man looks and listens with his "countenance...wan with terror"<sup>103</sup> as the characters upon the rock changed from DESOLATION to "SILENCE"<sup>104</sup>. Redon's graphite portrayal of "Silence—A Fable", by its simplicity, elicits Poe's silence via the overarching feeling of solitude and desolation. However, the graphite drawing is a very literal translation of Poe's story and it lacks the symbolism and mystery of Redon's charcoal *noirs* and lithographic compositions.

*A l'horizon, l'ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard interrogateur* quietly blends the emotional desolation of Poe's "Silence—A Fable" with

<sup>98</sup> Poe, "Silence—A Fable", p 459.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 459-460. Uppercase lettering is Poe's emphasis.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p 460.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p 460.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p 461. Italics are Poe's emphasis.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p 461.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p 461. Uppercase lettering is Poe's emphasis.

the theme of melancholia. Redon's visualization of Melancholy and Poe's writings about Melancholy both suggest the melancholic temperament. Each uses visually imaginative surroundings to elicit pervasive gloom and depression. Dürer's *Melencolia I* lacks Redon's subtlety because the etching uses established iconographic imagery to relate the theme of Melancholy. Redon admittedly also uses iconographic images. However, he mostly relies on ambiguity. The lithograph is visually intense because of the penetrating amount of black combined with the colour white accenting the enigmatic figures present within the image. The personal, wretched state experienced by Poe's melancholic temperament is "essentially incommunicable".<sup>105</sup> Yet, Poe attempts to understand his melancholic disposition by writing about disturbing and intrusive subject matter that symbolizes loneliness. At the very moment of the denouement in "Silence—A Fable", Poe relies on the macabre and verbal visual constructions to create a melancholic mood. *A l'horizon, l'ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard interrogateur* explores the personal and incommunicable melancholic temperament. It uses ambiguity and simplicity with *un regard interrogateur* [questioning glance] and *l'ange des CERTITUDES* [angel of CERTITUDE] to beckon the viewer to lose themselves in the subtleties of black. This visual voyage amidst the sea of black forms proves the loneliness and silence that thrives in a person's emotional baggage. The viewing experience of the lithograph is, without a doubt, effected by a viewer's own melancholic temperament while also being the result of both Poe and Redon's individual melancholia.

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<sup>105</sup> H. Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Søren Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology*, London 1995, p 5.

***Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES****The breath which leads living creatures is also in the SPHERES*

The fifth lithograph, *Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* [fig.2.12], finishes a succession of primarily black compositions in that the last two lithographs contain more black than white. Redon continues to employ overlapping geometric forms, which seem to actively float, undulating within a confined square space. The lithograph pictures two different realms. The first is the thick, black border styled with static, grotesque, severed heads which frame an open window. Within the window is the second realm made up from fluctuating forms. Spherical shapes surround a winged woman and, in the background, a face. This window represents the cosmos. The complex, cosmological image evokes Poe's *Eureka*, his prose work that poetically illustrates the creation of the world. He intended to write a factual essay, subtitled as "an Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe".<sup>106</sup> He struggled to make sense of the individual in the modern world. Thereby, his 'scientific' text turned into a discussion of the spiritual relationship between man and God: "his creatures ... which are really but infinite individualizations of Himself".<sup>107</sup> Poe wanted to re-order the world in accordance with his pseudo-scientific principles. He needed to confer meaning on metaphysical experiences, like death, that he cannot perceive. *Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* captures Poe's conception of the world by emphasizing the profundity and absurdity of Poe's speculative Universe. It introduces an assortment of images that originate in the realm of the fantastic imagination.

<sup>106</sup> E. A. Poe, *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. H. Beaver, New York 1976, p 211.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p 301.

### The Melancholic Female

*Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* is an arrangement of migrant floating spheres enclosed in a window of specified space. The black rectangular frame opens on a small rather organized cosmological system. The blackest part of the composition is the border; its darkness accentuates the variety of shaded circular shapes. Situated, barely discernible within the lower portion on the frame, are two decorative macabre heads. These grotesque faces illuminate the abnormal, subhuman features of humanity which are an expression of the primitive man exhibited earlier in *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*. The open eyes combined with the large, flat noses stereotypically portray the uneducated savage. The faces hold their mouths in different grimaces which give them a flat, dramatic mask-like quality. These mask forms may allude to the series of grotesque faces that Leonardo da Vinci made in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and early 16<sup>th</sup> century [figs.2.13 and 2.14a &b]. Redon, who expressed an admiration for da Vinci, says that da Vinci's creative aim in making pictures is to create, "through the play of light and dark [he produces] the greatest possible relief of one of the elements of nature".<sup>108</sup> However, unlike da Vinci, who places many of his heads at an angle or in profile, Redon positions the masks in a frontal pose. He rudely confronts the viewer by the utter monstrosity of their countenance.

The ornamented frame darkly borders the interior composition. Its blackness enacts the image to swell as well as recede, imbuing the cosmological scene with depth indicative of the Universe. On this surface, the first of many geometric spheres takes up

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<sup>108</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 91.



almost one-third of the entire image. The large, black orb recalls Redon's charcoal *noir*, titled *The Metal Ball* (1878) [fig.2.15], which modifies his motifs of floating imagery. In *The Metal Ball*:

A giant sphere has replaced the head of the giant; the figure touching it is no longer a naked, primitive youth, but a somewhat corpulent adult cast in the lineaments of an Eastern wise man, whose capped domelike cranium proclaims a dominant intelligence.<sup>109</sup>

In *Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* Redon illuminates the globe in the lithographic image with a patch of light along the frame's border. This spotlight is perhaps the reflection of a source of light that has been obstructed by the placement of the border. Directly over this patch of light, behind the giant orb, Redon situates two spheres. The first, which is almost entirely black save for a very darkened patch of greyish light, touches the upper border of the frame. Between this upper sphere and large globe, he positions the second sphere outlined with dark contour lines. In this instance, the reflected patch of light seems an almost pure white which is encroached by shadow. This smaller, centre sphere orients the beginning of a planetary ellipse that fades into the deep viewing field. It is as if Redon portrays a solar system of dark, eye-like orbs indicative of Poe's *Eureka*.

The shaded, three-dimensional spheres that Redon places in the recessive ellipsoidal pattern morph. They begin as globes accented with light to ones highlighted by a spot of darkness. The planets appear to have irises. This oscillating universe of floating spheres seems to be rigid executions of three-dimensional shapes. However, as the spheres retreat, Redon's handling of the lines that shade the spheres becomes more sloppy and dynamic. The spheres possess an animated frenzy made from quick, dark

<sup>109</sup> Druick and Zegers, "Taking Wing, 1870-1878", p 103.

strokes. The upper-left corner of the cosmological image contains hard, dark lines around the spheres. These lines also darken the space between the orbs, making them undulate with dynamic (almost electric) intensity. The first large orb seems static; it is too fixed and rendered with formal dimensionality. Contrary, the final sphere, which is both the blackest as well as the smallest, radiates with strong explosive lines. These pulsating feathery bands give the orb a sun-like appearance. Perhaps Redon's small, solid sphere represents the epoch of the black Sun of MELANCHOLY, which began to rise in *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenôr apparaît*. This dark sun, surrounded by the eye-like, rotund planets, symbolizes Redon's melancholic cosmos that originated in the nineteenth-century notions of spiritualism and occultism.

In the center of the composition stands a winged woman obstructed by a large sphere. Her beautifully executed body focuses the cosmos of floating planetary shaped around her figure. Encircling her neck sits a necklace with its basic geometric shapes fashionably welded together. The necklace grants her persona with an aristocratic demeanor. Beneath the ornamental neckpiece hangs a loose drapery that hints at her femininity. Her arm is bare, following the established shading technique of her head, neck and face. However, her torso, which would provide enough features to distinguish her sex, is instead vaguely defined, particularly her breasts. Redon had already shown veneration for da Vinci and Dürer by appropriating certain themes and images in his art. This winged female figure of *Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* may be interpreted as referencing Michelangelo's *Night* [fig.2.16] from the Medici Tomb Sculpture in San Lorenzo, Florence. The breasts of Redon's female form seem to mimic the abstract spherical stick-on breasts from Michelangelo's *Night*. The reclining female

figure *Night* stems from the male body exemplified by its defining muscles. Carved onto *Night*, not even accurately to the placement of anatomical breasts, are two round shapes indicating breasts, which are more like drooped spheres. While Michelangelo's *Night* is not a winged angelic figure, Redon's melancholic female dons a dark wing (the other apparently hidden by her body). She is analogous to *Night*, but she alternately references Dürer's *Melencolia I*. She recalls Poe's variety of female protagonists or as Huysmans' Des Esseintes classifies Poe's women as having "the inert, boyish breasts of angels, all were, so to speak, unsexed".<sup>110</sup> The female figure represents Poe's unsexed, heroic woman; her heroism is guaranteed by the angel-like virginity. She is unknowing of the carnality of love. But, she is not the stagnant Melancholy from Dürer's *Melencolia I*. She turns right, perhaps frightened, and looks at the floating face hidden amongst the cosmos. Two round, dark eyes stare out into the border. Melancholy, our winged androgynous female, is the angel of peaceful contemplation who has been startled by an obtrusive, enigmatic face.

As opposed to the masculine youth from *A l'horizon*, *l'ange des CERTITUDES*, et dans le ciel sombre un regard interrogateur and no longer the esoteric Eastern mystic of *The Metal Ball*, the winged female symbolizes the allegorical Melancholy. She looks over her left shoulder amidst the sea of dancing spherical forms which undulate around her. It is as if she bears witness to a cosmological event. The black crescent halo adorning her head replaces the laurel wreath Redon placed on the cherubic '*l'ange des CERTITUDES*' [*'Angel of CERTITUDE'*]. Melancholy's facial features echo the melancholic temperament. Her chiseled jaw sharply delineates her face from her neck

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<sup>110</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p 191.

and torso. Contour lines darkly separate her forehead from her hair, her ears from the back of her neck, and her jaw from her long neck. The face repeats the mask-like quality of the dramatic, grotesque faces along the border. Her open, attentive eye and drooped, firm lips reflect her sombre disposition.

Her composure contrasts with the hidden face, whose sex is indeterminate, only adding to the ambiguity of Melancholy herself. And while her profile possesses four of the five senses—only her hands have been severed by the presence of the planetary spheres—the floating face has only a large pair of eyes. An orb disconnects the nostrils and covers the thin, elongated nose. Redon draws the rectangular outline of the nose; it has been relegated to being an angular geometric shape juxtaposed with spherical forms. The shadow that surrounds the face obstructs the ears, if, indeed, the profile figure has ears. Redon places two thin eyebrows over the eyes which are also truncated by the spheres. The eyes reiterate the transformation when the planetary globes change from lightly accented spheres to converted eye-like orbs. The presence of these eyes within the cosmological universe and Melancholy make the image highly ambiguous and threatening. Mellerio defines the relationship between the female Melancholy and the floating face:

On aperçoit la tête et le buste d'une femme qui semble jongler avec les astres l'entourant et parmi lesquels apparaît un front et deux grands yeux qui regardent.

[One sees the head and the chest of a woman who seems to juggle with the stars surrounding her, and among which a forehead and two large eyes appears which watches.]<sup>111</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

The presence of the eye's gaze, which specifically watches Melancholy, may not directly meet her gaze but the face's close proximity to her body frightens and startles her. Mellerio imbues the woman with activity by saying "femme qui semble jongler avec les astres l'entourant" ["woman who seems to juggle with the stars surrounding her"].<sup>112</sup> However, her hands have been visibly cut-off; they are not even shown. If she 'jongler' ['seems to juggle'] with the spherical orbs, then she situates their placement within the cosmos. But, the eyes that 'regardent' ['watches'] cramp this universe. The orbs that she is meant to organize appear to overwhelm her, enclosing her figure.

### Eureka

Redon's *Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* represents a Universe of objects containing two figures that are obstructed and revealed within undulating planetary spheres. The composition calls to mind Poe's *Eureka*, which is an ambiguous text. This small book deals with the origin of the world, attempting to analytically interweave various different philosophical subjects—"Physical, Metaphysical and Mathematical—of the Material and Spiritual Universe; — of its Essence, its Origin, its Creation, its Present Condition and its Destiny"<sup>113</sup>—under one umbrella text. His self-proclaimed, humble opening posits that, while he writes with conviction, his aim is to "be continually endeavoring to suggest".<sup>114</sup> Poe relies on the power of suggestion, beginning with a letter conversation hidden in a bottle. After transcribing the letter into the text, he

<sup>112</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>113</sup> Poe, *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, p 211, Italics Poe's emphasis.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p 211, Italics Poe's emphasis.

expounds on the ideas found in it using pseudo-logic and his (very broad) personal interpretations of metaphysics. He postulates that "Mankind [is] a member of the cosmical family of Intelligences",<sup>115</sup> proving humanity's ultimate association with the cosmos ('Intelligences' refers to his concept of abstract thinking).

Poe's philosophical attempt to define and understand the universe is hubristic, as the final note to the text declares that:

The pain of the consideration that we shall lose our individual identity, ceases at once when we further reflect that the process... is, neither more nor less than that of the absorption, be each individual intelligence, of all other intelligences [*sic*] (that is, of the Universe) into its own. That God may be all in all, each must become God.<sup>116</sup>

His consideration of identity depends on there being a penetration of god-like attributes, but he acknowledges that he (nor any other human) "cannot conceive Infinity".<sup>117</sup> *Eureka* attempts to unify man and God, stating that the intended alliance is a desire sought by atoms and individuals. The floating assortment of spheres in *Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* may be Poe's globular atoms. These atoms have light and dark nuclei. They are also individual planets that are united by their association, which is either scientific (gravity) or metaphysical (desire). His planetary spheres are magnetically attracted (and, alternately, repulsed):<sup>118</sup> "the clusters themselves, with a speed prodigiously accumulative, have been rushing towards their own general centre ... the majestic remnants of the tribe of Stars flash, at length, into a common embrace".<sup>119</sup> The black and white spherical forms recede and grow, alternating in colour. If it is

<sup>115</sup> Poe, *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, p 213.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p 309.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p 224.

<sup>118</sup> See Poe's *Eureka*, p 265 in *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe* for a more detailed analysis of magnetic attraction.

<sup>119</sup> Poe, *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, p 304.



understood that Melancholy 'jongler' ['seems to juggle'], then she represents Poe's magnetic attraction. She is '*Le Souffle*' ['*the breath*'] from Redon's title for the fifth lithograph. However, the eyes that are hidden amongst the cosmos may also be the '*Le Souffle*' ['*breath*']. But, both are most certainly, *les êtres* [*the living creatures / beings*]. Melancholy is the centre into which the cosmos flows. The watchful eye intimidates and awes the winged female. The Universe, executed by Redon and narrated by Poe, is infinitely vast. Redon's border (with its primitive, monstrous heads) behaves as a window from one realm (the actual and grotesque) into another (the spiritual, the beautiful and the awesome).

***LA FOLIE******MADNESS***

The final lithograph *LA FOLIE* [fig.2.17] figures an austere human head and neck that is almost completely surrounded by negative space. The face is in profile; it overlaps a black, triangular geometric shape. The lithograph utilizes black as an accent, highlighting the figure with dark contour lines, which seems to flatten out the image. The simplicity of the composition is reiterated by the title *LA FOLIE* [*MADNESS*]. Ironically, the image is not maddening. There are no chaotic or dynamic lines that punctuate the image. Instead, it is quiet and simple, while also being profoundly enigmatic. Mellerio reflects the sincerity present in *LA FOLIE* stating:

Sur un triangle noir se desine la silhouette claire d'un visage à la  
physionomie à la fois concentrée et hagarde.

[The clear silhouette of the face and aspect at once focused and distraught  
is drawn on a black triangle.]<sup>120</sup>

The profile is marked with emotion that warrants it being called 'concentrée et hagarde' ['focused and distraught']. The physiognomy is suggestive of the melancholic state, when the mind is monopolized by fear.

**Redon's Vision of Madness**

Redon's *LA FOLIE* profile centres over a solitary triangle drawn to point. It is almost entirely black; it fades away into grey near the crown of the profile's head. While the

<sup>120</sup> Mellerio, Notes, Collected in the André Mellerio Papers (1895-1925, 1867-1943), Series VIII. Research notes and bibliography, Ryerson & Burnham Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. André Mellerio Papers, Ryerson & Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.

triangle's angularity seems strong and definitive, it lacks contour lines that would contain it within a specific boundary. The fuzzy edges disappear into the surrounding white of the lithograph. Both the negative space and the triangle have a grainy texture. The ridges trap black, absorbing the dark colour which allows the white to pop through like speckles of tiny light. The non-colour white opposes the dark shapes thereby emphasizing the few grey-black tones that are present within the composition. The profile's pallid silhouette faces in the direction of the triangle. The only definite amount of black within the face is located in the eye. Its pupil and iris form a dark, elliptical shape which is enclosed in the eye shown both in profile and facing forward. It may be that Redon reworked the eye on the lithographic stone. Because of its dual orientation, the eye would be capable of confronting the viewer either head on or with a sidelong glance. The pupil and iris lean toward the triangle, a shape that reiterates the gaze. If it is understood to be in profile, the eye looks down appearing sorrowful and dejected. The eye follows the overall orientation of the profile's head as Redon surrounds it with sketchy, nonspecific lines. These lines surround the bridge of the nose as a way of shading and confusing the perceived point of view.

The profile's countenance reflects an obsessive and vacant, haunting sadness. The silhouette is punctuated by the large, re-worked nose that, when looked at under a magnifying glass, visibly has two different contours. The first nose, which is the lighter of the two contour lines seems small and pointy. Its close proximity to the face designates a noble perhaps, haughty composure. This nose is a straight extension of the forehead. The re-worked nose emphatically pronounces the short, low forehead. This nose, which looks broken, recalls a stereotypically Hebrew nose. It also represents the various

different mask-like portrayals of monstrous primitive faces made throughout the album. The bridge of the nose curves outward while the end comes together in point. The lips follow the contour of the nostrils. The mouth, drawn down like a bow, appears as if hung with deep sorrow. Redon closes the lips together, not firmly, but, they are set in a particularly sad manner. The prominent, square chin contains what appears to be a cleft that may be the remnants of the profile's original shape. When comparing the two different profiles in the head and neck, a noticeable difference exists that contrasts the original sharp, aquiline shape with the broad, square masculine strokes. The hair, made from dark and light lines, follows the curves of the head as it covers the ears and falls down the neck. Each strand is individually rendered; there is little to no blending. However, the top of the head beginning about half way towards the crown, the hair lines become paler and less defined. The darkened lines imply a greasiness and un-cleanliness. His sorrowful composure is unaffected by the disarray of his actual physical appearance. The separation of the neck and head from the body reiterates the absence of the senses in the other five compositions.

### **The Melancholic Man**

Poe's prose stories often begin by introducing a characters countenance, thus suggesting to the reader the variety of flaws and strengths. Des Esseintes' theory in *A Rebours* about Poe's 'heroic' men posits that, in every human being, there is a mental state where fear "stupefies the faculties of volition".<sup>121</sup> This leaves the mind aware of the fact that it has lost control. The moment these characters (which are often male, though not necessarily)

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<sup>121</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p 191.

realize that they can no longer make rational judgments, they go mad. Madness is all consuming. It culminates in the perverse degeneration of the mind, body and soul where the mind elevates the soul to a stage of suspended animation.<sup>122</sup> Many of Poe's stories incorporate the theme of the perverse but, in particular, two stories exemplify a character's willingness for self-destruction, "The Man of the Crowd"(1839-1940) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839-1840).

"The Man of the Crowd" uses a narrator who witnesses odd events while people-watching from a London café. He becomes fascinated by the variety of people that wander the streets, "absorbed in contemplation of the scene without".<sup>123</sup> At first, he observes only the people's generalities. Then he focuses more narrowly as he "regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance".<sup>124</sup> As time passes, the scene changes from daylight to night with the lighting of the gas-lights. People of the more gentile nature, alongside the more mundane and normal people with somewhat expressive traits, no longer occupy the streets. Instead, he looks upon "darker and deeper themes for speculation".<sup>125</sup> The characters of the late hour exhibit grotesque, abnormal characteristics; their temperament is fixed in their countenances. Among the crowd of individuals, one man "at once absorbed [his] whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression".<sup>126</sup> Quickly, the narrator leaves the seat of the café and immediately follows the man. He becomes overwhelmed by the basest of emotions which arise in his mind

<sup>122</sup> H. Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville*, Ohio 1958, p 107.

<sup>123</sup> E. A Poe, "The Man of the Crowd", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 475.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p 475-476.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p 477.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p 478.

beginning with “power, [and] of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, or intense—of supreme despair”.<sup>127</sup> During the course of the night the man, followed closely by the narrator, staggers from one crowd to the next. At the moment when he loses the crowd itself, the man worries. He also stops only once to pray at the temple “of Intemperance—one of the palaces of the fiend, Gin”.<sup>128</sup> The narrator, because of a great desire, furiously follows the man until the early morning light. In the final moment, the narrator gazes directly into the man’s eyes:

“This old man,” I said at length, “is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd.* It will be vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds”.<sup>129</sup>

The dénouement represents the moment when the narrator challenges this man of the crowd. The ironic twist is that the narrator never realizes that he follows his other-self. The man of the crowd is the narrator’s *doppelgänger*. The narrator’s arousal to know the man stems from his own need to know himself. He is too blind to his own assertion that the man of the crowd ‘refuses to be alone’; he never recognizes that he too cannot be alone.

Unlike the narrator in the “Man of the Crowd”, Roderick Usher from “The Fall of the House of Usher” understands and even welcomes his degeneration. Overcome by perverse sorrow, Usher gives himself over to darkness and loneliness. In particular, the moment when he commits the crime that perpetuates his decline. The narrator in the story bears witness to a series of bizarre events. He has been asked by Usher to come help ease

<sup>127</sup> Poe, “The Man of the Crowd”, p 478.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p 481.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p 481. Italics are Poe’s emphasis.



the “acute bodily illness— of a mental disorder which oppressed him— ... with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady”.<sup>130</sup> The narrator’s first impressions of the House of Usher disturb him.

It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, thus action upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant eye-like windows.<sup>131</sup>

His imagination works contrary to his best efforts for happiness as he envisions the decline of the actual house. He is enclosed by the surrounding décor of the house, which contains “sombre tapestries, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies”.<sup>132</sup> In this environment, the narrator loses all confidence for the recovery of his friend, which is fully comprehended the moment he actually meets Usher. And, while he recognizes the friend from his youth in this reclusive, sorrowful man, he realizes the prophetic nature of his thoughts.

The description of Usher’s physiognomy signifies the pervasive fear and sorrow that overcomes the narrator, as well as describing the characteristics of an actual physical decay:

...The character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a suprisingly beautiful curve; a nose of delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity...[that] had been suffered to grow unheeded,

<sup>130</sup> E. A. Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 232.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p 231.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p 233.

and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, [the narrator] could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity.<sup>133</sup>

Usher's facial traits, which are severe and hauntingly beautiful, alert the narrator to the fact that his presence will not break Usher's spell whose melancholic disposition bounces between the "vivacious and [the] sullen".<sup>134</sup> On the first night of the narrator's arrival, Usher's sister, the Lady Madeline, dies. She is thought to succumb to a disease akin to Usher's, thereby leaving him in familial isolation. Leaning towards the incestuous, Usher is utterly tormented by the death of his sister. The moment the narrator and Usher place her in the crypt, they take one last look upon her face. Her mature body mocks both men who seem to envision "a faint blush upon the bosom and the face".<sup>135</sup> In an effort to secure this apparition from their minds, they screw down the lid and bolt the iron door of the tomb. After her burial, Usher's countenance alters; his "unceasingly agitated mind [laboured] with some oppressive secret ... [as he gazed] upon vacancy for long hours in an attitude of the profoundest attention".<sup>136</sup> One night, during a dark and awesome tempest, Usher deliriously realizes that he has "*put her living in the tomb!*".<sup>137</sup> At that moment, the door to the narrator's chamber bursts open revealing the live Lady Madeline dripping with the blood from her efforts to escape her premature burial. Horrified, the narrator flees, looking back only once as "the deep dark tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the *"House of Usher"*".<sup>138</sup> The earth swallows the house and its contents, leaving nothing but a deep, black pit.

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<sup>133</sup> Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher", p 234.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p 234.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p 240-241.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p 241.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p 245.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p 245.

*LA FOLIE* imaginatively combines the most degenerate characteristics from Poe's most perverse characters. The image simplifies the unstable emotions of both Usher and the man of the crowd as Redon renders a single face shown in an almost Greco-Roman profile. The two-fold nose recalls Poe's description of Usher whose own nose was of the "Hebrew model".<sup>139</sup> This solitary man, poised in a subtle white-grey background, is markedly accented with a strong geometric triangle in black. Throughout the entire lithographic series *A Edgar Poë*, Redon employs geometry to focus the gaze of his compositions either by accentuating the direction of the eye within the image or directing the gaze of the viewer. In *LA FOLIE*, the black triangle serves to balance the soft sketchy quality of the profile against the hard edges of the blackness. The eyes the sense that Redon uses iconographically, comprises a fully formed iris without a pupil. The darkness reiterates the black tarn that swallows the madness of Usher's house and persona while also referring to the black sun of melancholy. The eye is full and without any highlight; it darkly focuses the gaze of this melancholic man. It is as if the eye, which is often thought to be the window into the soul, has lost its luster. The curtain is drawn over the potential happiness and the rest is left to the silence of darkness.

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<sup>139</sup> Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher", p 234.

### Chapter 3 OUT OF DARKNESS

I thought in former days that art was useless; it might perhaps be necessary.

- Odilon Redon, *To Myself*<sup>1</sup>

The publication of *A Edgar Poë* marks a turning-point in the career of Odilon Redon by forging a bond between literature and the visual arts. The decadent J.-K. Huysmans, who once aligned himself with the Realism of Emile Zola, delighted in Redon's album declaring in a letter dated 12 February 1882 that *A Edgar Poë* was "si délicieusement et si cruellement fantaisistes" ["so delicious and so cruelly eccentric"].<sup>2</sup> Huysmans' letter confesses adoration for the bizarre. He acknowledges that he was "profondément ravi" ["profoundly delighted"] by "le funèbre comique anglais" ["the comic English funeral"].<sup>3</sup> His letter glorifies Redon's album in terms of its more Poe-esque qualities, in particular, by cultivating the myth that Redon and Poe had similar temperaments. Chapter two sought to show that, despite Redon's attempts to disassociate himself from Poe's works, the visual similarity of his images to Poe's stories proves his interest in the American author and his work. Chapter three serves the discussion by orienting Redon alongside his fellow artists and the various different ideologies that were contemporary to his life and art. It begins as a discussion on the perceived similarity of temperament between the two melancholic artists while also contextualizing the album *A Edgar Poë* within his larger oeuvre. But, the struggle Redon underwent throughout his career to become an established artist is finally realized through the adoption of colour as a way of expressing

<sup>1</sup> O. Redon, *To Myself: Notes on Life, Art and Artists*, trans. M. Jacob and J.L. Wasserman, New York 1986, p 97.

<sup>2</sup> J.-K. Huysmans, "I – Paris, 12 février 1882", in A. Redon (ed.), *Lettres: de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren...à Odilon Redon*, Paris 1960, p 99.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p 99.

his early macabre imagination. His art becomes infused with light, movement and dynamism the more he discards the themes of his *noirs* for more mystical and mythological imagery. But, despite all of his attempts, literature was always a constant source of inspiration as it first was in *A Edgar Poë*.

Redon sought to profit from the artistic and spiritual relationship believed to exist between himself and Poe. Although towards the end of his career, Redon denied having any interest in Poe, in the beginning, he willingly perverted the most innocent of comparisons. Years later, in a letter to André Mellerio dated 21 July 1898, Redon acknowledges the success of *A Edgar Poë*. He admits the importance it played in establishing his career, "l'album fut remarqué, c'était l'essentiel pour moi" ["the album was noticed, it was the essential one for me"].<sup>4</sup> The creation of *A Edgar Poë* revolutionized Redon's existing catalogue of work. It perpetuated the later self-proclaimed misconception with respect to his relationship with Poe, while, at the same time, it enabled Redon to partake of the thriving literary avant-garde of *fin-de-siècle* France. *A Edgar Poë* gave Redon the opportunity to develop his iconographic images directly onto the lithographic stone. The album's dedicatory title associates his new, reworked *noirs* with the work of Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's disposition, seen as the manic drunk whose analytical writing style elucidated his grotesque psychological imaginings, became synonymous with Redon's own elusive and quiet disposition. Redon and Poe's resemblance emerges due to their interest in dark and macabre subject matter; each man's art probes the depths of the human imagination. The six images from *A Edgar Poë* visualize this association; they improvise and alter prevalent themes alive in his earlier

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<sup>4</sup> O. Redon to A. Mellerio, "Peyrelebadé, 21 Juillet 1898", in Van Oest (ed.), *Lettres d'Odilon Redon*, Paris and Bruxelles 1923, p 31.

*noirs*. Also, the captions associate Redon's artistic, melancholic visions with the text which is reminiscent of Poe's enigmatic prose and poems. Each plate reflects Redon's imaginative musings on a variety of subjects, including themes prevalent to the progressive nineteenth-century French literary circle of Huysmans and Hennequin. These literary artists, who already greatly admired Poe, advocated for Redon's new art on his behalf. During the years 1879-1890, the black and white lithographs and charcoals intensify the comparison of Redon's personality with Poe. These eleven years saw Redon working through depressed anxieties (the family dispute over the Peyrelebadé property, resolved finally c.1910) and, in particular, the death of his first son Jean in 1886. His melancholic art reflects his interest in suffering, especially personal suffering. The variety of highly impersonal composite forms exemplifies his interest in the liberating imaginative world while, also, bearing a strong practical attachment to the natural world. Similar to Poe, he never loses sight of a formal design sensibility that orders even the most abstract or complex image within a logical system.

Following the publication of *A Edgar Poë*, Redon's previous album of lithographs titled *Dans le Rêve* (1879) [fig.3.1] received critical attention. In the same letter to Mellerio quoted in the previous paragraph, Redon asserts a greater appreciation for his first lithographic album noting that, unlike *A Edgar Poë*, *Dans le Rêve* "est façonné sans aucun alliage de littérature" ["it was produced without the intervention of any literary element"].<sup>5</sup> While it is not known for certain whether *Dans le Rêve* was made without the influence of literature, by the letter's date, 1898, he had almost abandoned art that contained a strong literary base. During the creation of the second album, Redon

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<sup>5</sup> Redon, "Peyrelebadé, 21 Juillet 1898", p 30.



pioneered the possibilities of unifying his art with literature. *A Edgar Poë* manipulates many of the motifs that are apparent in the series of 10 plates present in *Dans le Rêve*. In particular, Redon employs the severed head, the floating giant-eye and the wheel surrounded by bizarre and fantastic environmental elements. Natural figures coexist with man-made imaginings. *Triste montée* [*Sad ascent*] [fig.3.1j] recalls the first composition in *A Edgar Poë*, *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*. Instead of a giant-eye balloon carrying a severed head on a salver, Redon portrays the soaring head of a balloonist as the balloon. His passenger is a mutilated head, with wings, sitting on a plate. As opposed to the barren landscape from *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*, *Triste montée* floats over a small city. The plate uses recognizable forms which are representational of human flight (the balloonist) over human achievement (the city). The metaphor for progressivism, instead of being an ambiguous creation built with composites as seen in *A Edgar Poë*, relies on figurative, puppet-like images to convey a sorrowful and melancholic ascent.

Redon breaks away from the highly figural representations of humans present in *Dans le Rêve* in the execution of compositions for *A Edgar Poë*. He uses abstraction as opposed to representation. He distorts the human body by taking its pieces and blending them with shadow and light thereby evoking a new, macabre world. Plate four from *Dans le Rêve*, titled *La Roue* [*The Wheel*] [fig.3.1d] depicts a large wheel (the spoke is a Doric column) surrounded by two, winged forms. The larger floating head pictures an androgynous human and a tiny wing emerging from beneath its chin. The hair is snowy white; acute lines emanate out of the top of its head. Its eyes look up, towards the wheel, and past the winged form looming before it. The head is in profile; its long thin nose

turns down, beak-like, accentuating the gaunt lips. Like the raven-haired Poe from the introductory image in *A Edgar Poë*, this winged head appears poetic, as if it too suggests a mystical, yet human, literary bard. The ominous figure in *La Roue*, with its dark, shadowy moon-like face, juxtaposes the snow-white head. Two wings frame the mysteriously personified orb. The white wing folds down as if at rest, obstructing a portion of the face. Alternately, the dark wing, almost lost in shadow, extends fully as it overlaps the wheel. Redon subverts the wheel, the title of the lithograph, by overlaying two contradictory forms over its shape. The light, metaphorical poet glances up at the wheel, while the dark, seemingly evil moon-face stares out of the composition obstructing the wheel.

*Triste montée* and *La Roue* exhibit Redon's aptitude for portraying bizarre, dark themes without the known influence from literature. *Dans le Rêve* visualizes, through the lithographic medium, exact replicas of earlier charcoal *noirs*. In comparison, the six compositions in *A Edgar Poë* re-work earlier *noirs*, utilizing and expounding on the motifs expressed in *Dans le Rêve*. The severed head, the floating giant-eye, and various representations of eyes establish Redon's iconographic encyclopedia of images repeated throughout the ten plates of the first album. In *A Edgar Poë*, he modifies these motifs, developing new themes and ideas which invariably suggest his interest in allying himself with literature. *A Edgar Poë* merges the image and the text, integrating pictures with poetry. These captions, discussed in association with the images in Chapter Two, were originally misunderstood as lines from Poe's work. Redon writes to Mellerio, "je mis quelques mots sous ces nouvelles planches, habilement, je crois, et le public s'y trompa"

[“I put a few words under these new prints, skillfully I think, and the public fell for it”].<sup>6</sup> He intended the obvious Poe-esque words to be “bien permise, très légitime” [very permissible, perfectly legitimate]...“qu’une équivoque” [“a trick”].<sup>7</sup> In a subsequent letter to Mellerio, Redon continues to assert the captions independence from Poe. His letter suggests that his words were done in the manner of Poe, unlike later authors he made albums after: “Les légendes de l’album à Edgar Poe sont de moi ainsi que les autres, sauf quand il s’est agi de Flaubert ou Baudelaire” [“The captions for the album to Edgar Poe and for all the others are of my own invention, apart from those devoted to Flaubert or Baudelaire”].<sup>8</sup>

In 1883, Redon executed charcoal drawings, eventually unused, for inclusion in a new illustrated edition of Baudelaire’s translations of Poe seen in *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires*.<sup>9</sup> Of these, three charcoal drawings, sketches for lithographs, exemplify Redon’s enthusiasm for fashioning artwork after Poe’s stories. Un-captioned, he titles the images after recognizable moments in the stories. His titles often reuse Poe’s own. The first image visualizes “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), recalling the moment when the narrator’s nervous disposition drives him to murder the old man whose eye, “whenever it fell upon [him], [makes his] blood [run] cold”.<sup>10</sup> After the murderous deed, the narrator hides the man’s body beneath the floorboards. When the police arrive to answer a disturbance call, the narrator hears the beating of a heart, which he believes is the old man’s. In a frenzy of gesticulations, he confesses his crime, exclaiming: “I admit the

<sup>6</sup> Redon, “*Peyrelebadé*, 21 Juillet 1898”, p 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p 31.

<sup>8</sup> Redon, “*Peyrelebadé*, 16 Août 1898”, in Van Oest (ed.), *Lettres d’Odilon Redon*, Paris and Bruxelles 1923, p 33.

<sup>9</sup> The images were not used in the new 1884 edition of Baudelaire’s *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires*.

<sup>10</sup> E. A. Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart”, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 303.

deed! – tear up the blanks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!”.<sup>11</sup> The image entitled *The Tell-Tale Heart* [fig.3.2] pictures the dead man’s presence. Redon eliminates the beating heart and replaces it with a solitary eye looking out from two floorboards. The curtain-like boards reveal the dead man’s stare, which is a metaphor for the narrator’s inability to hide from his own conscience. The eye, outlined with strong contour lines and surrounded by an aura of light, contains a black, un-articulated iris. The blank eye, like the heart of “The Tell-Tale Heart”, signifies the presence of the narrator’s internal psychological conflict. The image *The Tell-Tale Heart* vitiates the agitated emotional delirium present within the story, supplanting it with a serene, intense gaze that confirms the internal moral discord displayed by the narrator.

Redon’s second image, entitled *The Cask of Amontillado*, visualizes the mood of Poe’s story “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846). Pictured is not the spiteful, vindictive narrator, Montresor. Rather, the charcoal portrays the victim, the harlequin-costumed Fortunato. Conned into following the narrator into a wine cellar and crypt, Fortunato wears his costume celebrating the Italian carnival season. His hat, much like a jester’s, is covered with tiny little bells that tinkle with sound as the two men probe deeper into the cellar. Poe characterizes Fortunato as a man to be “respected and even feared”.<sup>12</sup> But the dunce cap reveals that, as Fortunato walks towards his death, he is the fool. Redon’s charcoal image [fig.3.3], recently criticized by Fred Leeman as unsuccessful in “capturing the essence of Poe’s great tale”,<sup>13</sup> triumphantly evokes the fate of the swaying, drunk

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p 306.

<sup>12</sup> E.A. Poe, “The Cask of Amontillado”, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 274.

<sup>13</sup> F. Leeman, “Odilon Redon: The Image and the Text”, in D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers (eds), *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams 1840-1916*, exh. cat., The Art Institute of Chicago 1994, p 185.

Fortunato whose own greed damns him to death. Fortunato stands before a large wooden door, his shoulders and head pivot in different directions confessing his drunken state which Redon emphasizes with the dynamic movement of the little bells embellishing Fortunato's hat. His face does not excite fear or respect with regards to his character; indeed, the face seems child like with its white, ruffled collar. His countenance questions the death sentence that awaits him. The wooden door foreshadows Fortunato's live burial, emphasized by Redon's blending the face with the door. The gaunt profile's deeply sunken cheeks carry the overtones of a skeleton which foretells Montresor's desire for the ruin and damnation of Fortunato.

The last image, entitled *The Teeth* [fig.3.4], visualizes Poe's "Berenice". The narrator, Berenice's betrothed cousin Egaeus, falls in love with her teeth after a disease causes her beauty to deteriorate. He represents the perversion of reason as he replaces his intellectual musings, which often occur in the library, with Berenice's own presence, particularly her perfect, white teeth. The instance that her sickly, yellowed body stands before him, Egaeus becomes enamoured by her teeth, "the teeth! –the teeth! ...everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me".<sup>14</sup> At the moment of her death, Egaeus falls into a trance as he shudders to recall the events of the day. His memory is haunted by the screams of a woman; the repressed scream recollects the hour when Egaeus, "replete with horror",<sup>15</sup> extracted Berenice's teeth from her jaw waking her from her apparent death. *The Teeth* represents Redon's vision of the narrator's abstracted musings. The image includes a full set of teeth that float before a backdrop of ordered books. Relying on chiaroscuro, Redon's image addresses Egaeus' fixated hallucinatory

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<sup>14</sup> E.A. Poe, "Berenice", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 646.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p 647.

meditation on Berenice's teeth, surrounded by an array of illuminated lines revealing his fanatic contemplation. Redon shows the cousin's fetishistic obsession with the teeth. He does not present the gross-clinic revelation at the end of the story that reveals Egaeus' crime. Rather, the theatrical moment of the denouement is absent from Redon's charcoal when instruments for "dental surgery, intermingled" with the blood stained teeth "scattered to and from about the floor".<sup>16</sup> Poe's own story, while solved, contains a "deliberate air of unreality...because the narrator refuses to admit the [crime] fully into consciousness".<sup>17</sup> Redon similarly entrusts the teeth to the mysterious reflections that overcome Egaeus by keeping the teeth pure with their placement within the confines of the library. He pictures Egaeus' ghoulish desire and not the horrific crime.

The series of three charcoals drawings analyzed above introduces visual proof that Redon was interested in the work of Poe. He made images based on Poe's stories which evoke Poe's extensive themes of melancholy and perversity. However, Redon's images do not visualize the sinister a-morality of Poe's characters. The dark and diabolic qualities inherent to Poe's stories are absent from Redon's compositions. The series of images removes evil and, instead, conveys a mood more suggestive of fear and horror. Redon captures the tense mood leading up to or following the crime; he never pictures the criminal act. These images invent a scenario that blends the literature of Poe with an assortment of complex undulation forms in black and white not unlike a piece of music that sets the mood and rhythm for the scene to follow.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p 648.

<sup>17</sup> J. Porte, *The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James*, Middletown 1969, p 83.



In the years 1882 to 1883 that Redon devoted to Poe, Emile Hennequin approached him for his first commission.<sup>18</sup> Hennequin asked Redon to make a drawing after Poe, particularly a story from Hennequin's translation of Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* [*Contes Grotesques*] (1882). Redon chose "The Raven" (1845) as his subject matter.<sup>19</sup> His decision to execute a drawing after Poe's most famous poem denotes his own interest in perpetuating the Poe – Redon artistic relationship. He still, at this point in his career, wanted to exploit criticism that allied his work with Poe's. However, Ollendorff, Hennequin's publisher, corrupted Redon's *Raven* [fig.3.5], thereby distorting his artistic association with Poe, an affiliation that Redon believed he could control. Intended as a vignette or frontispiece for Hennequin's book, the *Raven* shows a raven perched on a windowsill. The solitary bird, placed between an interior window and an exterior shutter, naïvely suggests an otherwise dark and provocative story. Redon's ability to make ambiguous and imaginative art does not stand out. Instead, in its place, sits a naturalistic bird with a down-turned beak, the head inclining away from its small, fluffy body. His banal image lacks the intensity of Poe's enigmatic and grim imagery that earns the raven the title of being the "ominous bird of yore".<sup>20</sup>

Ollendorff exploits Redon's image when he appropriated it for the cover of *Contes Grotesques* [fig.3.6]. He overlaid it with text, seizing it as an opportunity to advertise Hennequin's translation. Ollendorff trusted that the image, regardless of its prosaic characteristics, was a recognizable icon of Poe's work which could arrest the attention of

<sup>18</sup> See R. Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, London 1977, p 40.

<sup>19</sup> Redon's choice of portraying Poe's "The Raven" is interesting as the poem is not included in Hennequin's translation. Redon may have chose "The Raven" because of Eduoard Manet's famous lithographic illustrations of Mallarmé's translation of Poe's "The Raven" (1875).

<sup>20</sup> E.A. Poe, "The Raven", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York 1975, p 945.

the public, thus, luring them into purchasing the book. According to Redon, Ollendorff greatly injured his artistic reputation. Redon wrote to his brother, Ernest, in a letter dated 30 January 1883, complaining about the treatment that Hennequin and he had received while touching upon the subject of lithography and the victimization of the artist:

Quand le livre parut, il n'y avait rien de-dans. Hennequin avait été trompé par l'Editeur qui avait fait de mon dessin un oiseau de réclame ... Tout en ayant l'air de favoriser à bon marché, la multiplication de la pensée, le gros industriel qui tient les presses s'enrichit.

[When the book appears, there will be nothing inside. Hennequin has been cheated by the editor who has turned my drawing of a bird into an advertisement ... While appearing to encourage bargains and the distribution of ideas, the fat industrialist who owns the presses lines his own pockets.]<sup>21</sup>

Redon's statements about Ollendorff's misuse of his image disregards the fact that the drawing expresses a trite evocation of Poe's poem. However, the resentment Redon had towards Ollendorff did not harm his professional nor personal relationship with Hennequin. Following this first commission and after designing the charcoal drawings after Poe's stories for inclusion in Baudelaire's *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires*, Redon moved away from using Poe as an obvious source of inspiration thereby ignoring and disputing their artistic connection. He wanted to purge his art of being considered solely as literary, while at the same time return to a more innocent execution of art in lithography. Looking back in his letter to Mellerio, Redon finds that *A Edgar Poë* was too "précis dans l'exécution, et presque sec" ["precise in the execution and almost dry"].<sup>22</sup> With the subsequent albums, as he moves away from literature "J'ai supprimé les

<sup>21</sup> S. Sandstrom, *Le Monde Imaginaire d'Odilon Redon: étude iconologique*, Lund 1955, p 186.

<sup>22</sup> Redon, "Peyrelebede, 21 Juillet 1898", p 31.

légendes” [“I did away with the captions”],<sup>23</sup> he wanted to rediscover “l’aisance et la spontanéité” [“the ease and the spontaneity”]<sup>24</sup> in designing lithographic albums.

Redon’s more literary albums connote his interest in exploring literature. However, his works are not creations stemming from a purely literary fashion. His own intellect and melancholy interpret the works; he is an individual artist who translates literary artists like Poe to the dream world of the visual arts. During the years 1870-1890, Redon manipulated a variety of other artist’s work, as a way of exploring his own interest in the bizarre and melancholic. He wanted to make personally expressive work that resulted from intellectual meditations on another man’s literary genius. He makes use of metaphor, representing colourless and ambiguous forms “according to the logic of the visible world”.<sup>25</sup> Remy de Gourmont expressed in his *Le Problème du style* that Redon’s visualizations of literature into art resulted from a method to “make visible for us certain images ... by sacrificing universal logic to the logic of the imagination”.<sup>26</sup> Redon’s ability to create imaginative works after ambiguous (and also analytical) literature demonstrates his capability as an artist to make new art out of literature. But, this does not label him as being solely dependent on literature as a source. Rather, the amount of work Redon produced during the years 1879-1890 represents a depressed mania where he sought to purge himself from a dominating melancholic disposition by creating an expansive body of work executed in black.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p 31.

<sup>25</sup> Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, p 39.

<sup>26</sup> R. de Gourmont, *Le Problème du style*, Paris, 1938, p 89 in Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, p 75.

His artistic literary albums, as well as independent lithographic images, declare not the lethargy of the will, but rather a deep need to probe the darkness of his melancholy:

Formerly, when I produced drawings and lithographs and published them, I often received letters from strangers telling me of their attachment to this art, and revealing to me an exalted emotion. One of them confessed to having been touched to the point of religious feeling and having received faith from them. I do not know if art has such power; but since then, I have had to face with more consideration certain of my works, particularly those executed in hours of sadness, of pain, and which for this very reason, are probably more expressive. Sadness, when it is without cause, is perhaps a secret fervor, a sort of oration, something vaguely like worship, in the unknown.<sup>27</sup>

The works picture his own psycho-spiritual expression, which makes him unable to relate to the spiritual phenomena experienced by a viewer when seeing his art. An image like *Le souffle qui les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* in *A Edgar Poë* illustrates Redon's interest in the existence of a heavenly universe. Like Poe, he orients the heaven in accordance with his own need for philosophical enlightenment that will explain universal human suffering brought on by uncertainty and death. Black, undulating forms obstruct the female figure indicative of Melancholy; she represents Redon's muse of darkness which he surrounds with a solar system of celestial forms. *Le souffle qui les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* embodies Redon's more beautiful and divine musings on the redemption of depression while most compositions in *A Edgar Poë* envision his inclination towards the grotesque. He shrouds the images in uncertainty and ambiguity, relying on the Poe-tic captions to steer the viewer towards and away from any specific understanding of the image. The compositions are without a definitive meaning. He

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<sup>27</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, pp 102-103.

liberally manipulates literature in order to create imaginative artwork that illustrates a spiritually personal journey.

### The Symbolist Reception

Redon acknowledged that much of his work *reflects* literature, but it is not the *result* of literature. In particular, the lithographic album *A Edgar Poë* is made in tribute to Poe while also allying Redon's new lithographic art to literary artistic circles, including the Decadents and the Symbolists. He lays out the parameters for making art after a literary source as well as explains the nature of literary art:

There is no literary notion as long as there is no plastic invention. This does not exclude invention, but any idea, which could be expressed in words, is subordinated to the impression produced by purely pictorial touches. ...A picture thus conceived will leave in the mind a lasting impression that words could not translate.<sup>28</sup>

Redon's writings regarding the standards of literary art reflect the theories of Symbolism and Symbolist art, but his theories did not begin in Symbolism. Redon achieved a balance in his compositions by juxtaposing natural forms with unnatural figures, an idea that exhibited the principles in Charles Baudelaire's "Correspondences" (1857). Baudelaire's short poem summons mysterious forms that live in harmony and herald the beginnings of a new, Symbolist world:

Nature is a temple, where the living  
Column sometimes breathe confusing speech;  
Man walks within these groves of symbols, each  
Of which regards him as a kindred thing.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, pp 67-68.

<sup>29</sup> C. Baudelaire, "Correspondences" [*Correspondances*] (1857), *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. with notes by J. McGowan, New York 1998, p 19.

“Correspondences” integrates the metaphorical natural environment (columns, groves, night and sunlight) with symbolic and spiritual components (“Frankincense, musk, ambergris, benjamin”<sup>30</sup>). Baudelaire’s poem allies the metaphysical with the physical, an aspiration prevalent throughout Redon’s career. His artwork, while never specifically attached to any particular ideology, illustrates the perceptible Symbolist mood inherent to his compositions, particularly the *noirs* and lithographs executed during the years 1879-1890.

Gustave Kahn, a theorist and poet, theorized the progress of Symbolism. His poetic works attempted to make poetic form more versatile, he established and helped formulate *le vers libre* [the free verse]. Kahn advocates for the liberation of the visual art from Realism and French academic art as an attempt to transcend the monotony of tradition. He identifies Redon as an artist whose own break with Gérôme (c. 1865) created a free art which became the visual representation of the literary *vers libre*. To Kahn, Redon’s art freely integrates visionary images, which lack any specific Academic formality, with poetic captions. In particular, Kahn saw Redon’s work as containing a visual literary component far from the fad of depicting the “contemporaneous”.<sup>31</sup> The black and white forms of his albums vibrate with the struggle to communicate an idea that is in no way bound to the prosaic workaday world. Especially the six images of *A Edgar Poë*, while stemming from actual forms, are composites that relate more to the dream world than the real world. Kahn’s criticism, while not the most important and long-lasting for Redon, placed his art within the un-restrictive boundaries of Symbolism. Kahn

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p 19.

<sup>31</sup> G. Kahn, “Réponse des symbolistes”, *L’Événement*, 30 September 1886. in M. Stevens, “The Transformation of the Symbolist Aesthetic”, in D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers (eds), *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams 1840-1916*, exh. cat., The Art Institute of Chicago 1994, p 198.



forges an alliance between poetry and artistry in order to demonstrate how an illustration can surpass pure visualization and become an evocation of ideals.

In comparison, Maurice Denis, a painter and founder of the Nabi group, articulates that the visual arts speak its own, highly spiritual, language. For Denis, art does not have to be allied with literature to have merit. He insists that, when image and text are fused in a single work, the image should receive as much (if not more) attention as the text:

Trouver cette décoration sans servitude du texte, sans exacte correspondance de sujet avec l'écriture; mais plutôt une broderie d'arabesques sur les pages, un accompagnement de lignes expressives.

[To find this decoration without its being subservient to the text, without the exact correspondence of subject and writing but rather an embroidery [*sic*] of arabesques on the page, an accompaniment of expressive lines.]<sup>32</sup>

When a poet uses words to articulate an emotion, the poet's expression stems from the words themselves; whereas, an artist uses line, colour, contour and form to convey the expression of an emotion. Denis further asserts that art should be autonomous, maintaining the principle of art for art's sake:<sup>33</sup>

Se rappeler qu'un tableau – avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote – est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées.

[Remember that a painting – before being a war horse, a nude woman, or a story – is essentially a flat surface covered with colors, assembled in a certain order.]<sup>34</sup>

While *A Edgar Poë* is not pure formalism, due to the nature of its content, it exhibits characteristics of Denis' art for art's sake. Redon simplifies his images, abstracting and

<sup>32</sup> M. Denis, "Definition de néo-traditionnisme", *Art et Critique*, 23 and 30 August, 1890, in P.A. Genova, *Symbolist Journals: A Culture of Correspondence*, Aldershot 2002, p 172.

<sup>33</sup> Denis' 'art for arts sake' implied painting whose content was expressed entirely through form, however, his own work cannot be considered pure formalism. See J.-P. Bouillon, "The Situation of Maurice Denis", in *Maurice Denis: 1870-1943*, exh. cat., Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, trans. T. Wilcox and C. Stumpf, Spadern 1994, pp 13-7.

<sup>34</sup> Denis, "Definition de néo-traditionnisme", *Art et Critique*, 23 and 30 August, 1890, p 170.

merging a variety of natural and unnatural forms together. He makes monsters utilizing highly ambiguous juxtapositions of monochromatic colour in order to render a more pure art form. His integration of art with literature made his visions transferable to the Symbolist ideology. Denis<sup>35</sup> elevates Redon to a sort of spiritual leader who led this younger group of artists: "It was Redon's idea, through the vehicle of his series of lithographs and his admirable charcoal drawings, which were to determine that art would move towards the spiritual in 1890".<sup>36</sup>

Redon's spiritual works unified image with text. Both artists and writers admired his artistic achievements, as Mellerio asserts, "Writers like[d] him [for] the harsh virginity of his concepts; artists [gave] him credit for his powers of execution. A somewhat rare agreement".<sup>37</sup> Redon recognized that his work was criticized and applauded, not only for its artistic execution but, also, for the presence of literature. He believed in the power of suggestion and effect. His art suggests that overt ambiguity is the reflection of the inherent subjectivity in a work which bears "no single impression. The effect is contained uniquely in the ideas born from it".<sup>38</sup> Regarding *A Edgar Poë*, Redon noted that the literary artists could not dismiss or disregard the album's attachment to Poe. Literature became visual art. Therefore, while he wanted to create art for a more literary circle, he concludes: "It would have been good ... to proclaim that art has a function entirely different from literature".<sup>39</sup> He proclaims that, unlike literature, whose merit is determined through the compilation of words and their unified meaning, "a work of art is

<sup>35</sup> Denis executed a painting titled *Homage to Cezanne* (1900) as exemplary of Redon's particular importance to the Symbolist group.

<sup>36</sup> M. Denis, Article in *La Vie*, 30 November 1912, in *Maurice Denis*, p 258.

<sup>37</sup> Article in *La Vie Moderne*, stated by Mellerio and taken from, *L'Oeuvre graphique complet d'Odilon Redon*, Paris, 1913, p 139 as quoted in Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, p 56.

<sup>38</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 68.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p 90.

important according to its dimensions, executions, choice of subject or thought".<sup>40</sup> Fred Leeman's recent critical assertion that an "illustration could be more defined and specific than text, in that the former renders an image that the latter evokes",<sup>41</sup> misconstrues the definition of illustration, a word Redon himself never used with respect to his own work.

Je n'ai jamais employé le mot défectueux 'd'illustration'. Vous ne le trouverez pas en mes catalogues. C'est un terme à trouver: je ne vois que ceux de transmission, d'interprétation, et encore, ils ne sont pas exacts pour dire tout-à-fait le résultat d'une de mes lectures passant dans mes noirs organisés.

[I have never used the misleading word "illustration". You will not find it in my catalogues. The right word remains to be found: words like transmission, or interpretation may be used, but even these do not describe exactly the process by which something I have read passes into my black and white drawings and prints.]<sup>42</sup>

If an illustration is thought to picture an artist's idea visually, then the subjectivity of a work of art is understood through the relations between colour, line, shape and form. If, however, an artist verbally elucidates his intentions, he interprets with words his illustration. In this instance, the work of art is then defined two-fold. Ambiguity is not rendered more visible. If anything, Redon intended with his literary albums to mystify. Especially in *A Edgar Poë*, his enigmatic visions become even less defined. His work is open for interpretation and dispute thereby enabling a variety of different groups the opportunity to interpret his works as demonstrative of their own ideologies and purposes.

The images in *A Edgar Poë* pronounce Symbolism's aesthetic philosophy. The poetic, *vers libre* captions consign Redon to Kahn's poetic form. While the spiritual, melancholic musings transcend his art for Denis and the Nabis group. However, his art

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p 28.

<sup>41</sup> Leeman, "Odilon Redon: The Image and the Text", p 185.

<sup>42</sup> Redon, "*Peyrelebadé*, 21 Juillet 1898", pp 31-2.

does not relegate him to the ideological constraints of Symbolism. His art has neither ancestors nor descendants; he cannot be labeled. Redon's attitude towards Symbolism resembles his attitude towards any art movement; he is wary of being pigeonholed or restricting himself with a title. He constantly asserts his independence, specifically with regards to the art he devised:

You don't make the art you want. The artist is from day to day the receptacle for his surroundings; he receives from outside sensations and he inevitably transforms them, inexorably and tenaciously according to himself alone.<sup>43</sup>

Redon makes it appear as though he had no control over his subject matter, that he simply watched the world around him and allowed his sensations and perceptions to influence him. He suggests that, with regards to his black and white works, the abstract line – a form that exists in all living things – acted “directly on [his] spirit”.<sup>44</sup> Such statements mystify his esoteric work. He gives his art no concrete definition, leaving himself, with his essential contradictions, open for interpretation.

Similar to Redon's personality as an artist, Symbolism is full of paradoxes. The manifestos and theories often run contrary to one another depending on the journal or the theorist. Symbolism worked towards the expression of an Idea, through various different forms of representation, and emulating a truth. However, the Idea could never be attained because “the essential character of symbolic art is never to reach the idea itself”.<sup>45</sup> Unlike its predecessors, Naturalism and Realism, Symbolism renounced the natural environment as the *only* source of inspiration. An artist's responsibility, to be both participant and

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<sup>43</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p 21.

<sup>45</sup> J. Moreas, “Le symbolisme”, *Supplément littéraire de Figaro*, (September 18, 1886), p 150, in H. Dorra (ed.), *Symbolist Art Themes: A Critical Anthology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1994, p 151.

observer, was to bear witness to the mundane modern world and document his/her impressions via poetry, prose, images or musical compositions. The importance of formal training or talent was secondary as long as an artist could achieve the goal of portraying a truth with respect to the world. The personality of the artist, which created a “personal reading of [any] archetypal emotion”,<sup>46</sup> also tampered with the artist’s perception and documentation; as Redon says, “art ... has no other source than the soul in the midst of the world surrounding it”.<sup>47</sup> Mellerio believes that Redon isolated himself from society so that he could elevate himself above the monotony of daily life; his private life allowed for “faces [to] burst out of gleams of a divine dream- faces of martyrs for whom burning stakes turns into roses”.<sup>48</sup>

Redon’s art began as a response to his solitude and loneliness. Beginning as a youth, alone in the region of Medoc and living on Peyrelebadé, Redon willingly ostracized himself. Unlike Huysmans’ (personified in his character, des Esseintes) who suffers from a sort of psychosomatic nervous illness, Redon endured his melancholic temperament silently and without any decadent behavior. His art reflects his personal melancholic disposition, depicting the *mal-de-siècle*<sup>49</sup> vision of the *fin-de-siècle*. Like Arthur Rimbaud who wanted to become “a seer ... to reach the unknown through the unsettling of *all the senses*”,<sup>50</sup> Redon had to recognize the existence of the *doppelgänger* or Baudelaire’s *dédoublement*. His work responds to his nineteenth-century environment.

<sup>46</sup> P.A. Genova, *Symbolist Journals: A Culture of Correspondence*, Aldershot 2002, p 163.

<sup>47</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 93.

<sup>48</sup> A. Mellerio, “Odilon Redon”, (1894), in H. Dorra (ed.), *Symbolist Art Themes: A Critical Anthology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1994, pp 58.

<sup>49</sup> A number of poets and artists believed that they suffered from an intense deprivation of sensual experience, seemingly the result of constraints placed by society upon the artistic mind.

<sup>50</sup> A. Rimbaud, “Arthur Rimbaud pendant la Commune, une lettre inédite de lui-le voyant”, *La Revue européenne*, (October 10, 1928), pp 988-989, in H. Dorra (ed.), *Symbolist Art Themes: A Critical Anthology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1994, p 138.



He both participates and observes in order to recognize the melancholic temperament that dominated him. Redon acknowledges his melancholy, suggesting that if he could only read the letters in his brother, Ernest's, possession, they "pour me connaître tel que je fus" ["would show me as I was then"].<sup>51</sup>

### Belgian Commissions

Redon's artwork (especially his graphic designs) found a following in Brussels (and away from Paris). The Belgian avant-garde circle of twenty artists known as *Les Vingt* (1884-1893) focused on Redon as a creator of masterpieces, turning to his work as a source of inspiration and guidance. As in Paris with critics like Hennequin and Huysmans, the Belgian literary avant-garde immediately received Redon's work. Notably, the poets saw Redon's visions as the most pure expressions of their own hallucinatory, macabre dreams. Many writers and poets commissioned Redon to create frontispieces for their books. Emile Verhaeren, a young poet, charged Redon with designing a lithograph for his 1887 compilation of poetry entitled *Le Soirs* (*Evenings*). Redon created a man-rock, a motif of a landscape altered by the imagination entitled *L'Idole* (*The Idol*) [fig.3.7], which would become a recurring image in his work. Another commission for two frontispieces came from Iwan Gilkin, founder of the journal *Le Jeune Belgique*. The images for *Le Damnation de L'artiste* (*Damnation of the Artist*) [fig.3.8] and *Ténèbras* (*Darkness*) [fig.3.9] were made in 1890 and 1892 respectively. Gilkin's pieces demonstrate Redon's penchant for creating dark, damned images. *Le Damnation de L'artiste* visualizes three floating figures, two of which are heads with wings and one is a shrouded, almost

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<sup>51</sup> O. Redon, "2 Octobre 1898", in Van Oest (ed.), *Lettres d'Odilon Redon*, Paris and Bruxelles 1923, p 37.



nebulous, human form. The composition is almost entirely black and in the right foreground is the arm of a lyre with one string, recalling the myth of Orpheus. The first winged figure, perhaps a bard, looks directly at the lyre. However, the fact that this figure has no arms exemplifies that the bard cannot perform his music. Floating behind the figure, emerging from the shadows, is the head whose vacant eyes and pointed nose and chin recall a skeletal face or perhaps the mask of a monkey. The shrouded, white figure seems to be nothing more than a mysterious apparition, perhaps the bard's lost muse. *Ténèbras* pictures a winged female standing in or presenting a cup. Richard Hobbs associates Redon's image with two lines taken from Gilkin's "La Pensée" ["Thought"]: "The black angel has handed me the cup of black onyx / In which the cerebral drink boils sinisterly".<sup>52</sup> Redon's image pictures the angel and the cup yet, besides her devilishly pointy wings, her composure as well as her surroundings do not indicate a sinister environment.

Redon's most important commission stemming from his relations with *Les Vingt* was from the lawyer and founder of *L'Art Moderne*, Edmond Picard, who ordered from Redon a series of images to be designed after his play, *Le Juré* [*The Juror*] (1887). The works would be exhibited during the performance of the play. Picard wanted them to reflect the guilt and despair of the fictional juror. Redon's images ignore Picard's political overtones as they successfully glorify the perversity of the story. The images represent two classes in society. The first images chosen for this analysis is "*Elle se montre à lui, dramatique et grandiose avec sa chevelure de prêtresse druidique*" ("She shows herself to him, dramatic and grandiose with her hair like a druid priestess")

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<sup>52</sup> Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, p 66.

[fig.3.10]. Pictured is an oversized female profile bedecked with ornamented braids which appear Medusa-like. Her nose is exceedingly thin and pointed, her forehead is high and white, and her chin is slightly raised. She is proud, and simultaneously she instills fear. The second image pictures Redon's iconographic primitive: "*Un homme du peuple, un sauvage, a passé sous la tête de chevaux* ('A man of the people, a savage passed beneath the horses' heads') [fig.3.11]. His primitive nature stems from an almost animalistic rendering; his nose and large eyes and ears make him seem like a mouse, a creature that would literally pass 'sous la tête de chevaux' [pass beneath the horses' heads].

The following Redon received from these Belgian, literary, artists serves to connote that despite Redon's fervor in advocating he was not a literary artist, his art did serve the purpose of visualizing literary art. Not unlike the album dedicated to Poe, Redon utilized his talents of imaginatively translating the art of another into a new, free art of his own. These Belgian artists do nothing to dispel the notion of Redon as a literary artist. Rather, these artists serve two purposes: first, the lithographs follow the trend Hennequin set in commissioning Redon to create a piece after a set of translations. As Hennequin granted Redon the freedom to chose his own subject matter, this set the precedence that Redon was an independent artist who utilized literature as a source of inspiration, but not the only inspiration. Secondly, the group of *Les Vingt* also became a way for Redon to promote his art within a new circle of avant-garde artists. These friends, who often received autographed pieces aside from the commissioned works, would defend Redon's more (seemingly) subverse artworks. They became advocates, as well as admirers.

## A Colourful Redemption

Black is the most essential color. ...[It] should be respected. Nothing prostitutes it. It does not please the eye and does not awaken sensuality. It is the agent of the spirit much more than the splendid color of the palette or of the prism.<sup>53</sup>

During the 1880s and 90s, Redon completed various commissions for literary patrons making many images after literature. However, after the publication of *A Edgar Poë* and following his designs based on the works of Poe, he tried to free himself from an apparent dependence on literature with the publication of a non-literature-based album. Besides *Dans le Reve*, which bears no poetic captions, the album furthest removed from literature is *Les Origines* [*Origins*] (1883). This album is explicitly linked to the theme of evolution; the eight plates show the birth and generation of creatures that appear monstrous, yet beautiful. The presence of man amidst a cast of solitary eyes, swirling serpentine forms, and mythical beasts illustrates the further development of Redon's iconographic style. *Les Origines* entertains the idea that both myth and beasts originate in man and, in particular, in the imagination of man. The compositions, which were numbered and ordered by Redon, swirl and mutate. The final image [fig.3.12] portrays a dark man against a stark, lunar-rock landscape, raising his arm as if covering his head in shame. This concluding image places man with beast; he is at the furthest point from heaven, walking in a desolate landscape. Perhaps he represents Adam, expelled by God from the Garden of Eden. *Les Origines* was the first and last album to follow *A Edgar Poë* that was without being a direct homage to a literary source.

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<sup>53</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 103.

*Homage à Goya* [*Homage to Goya*] (1885) is dedicated to Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). It pictures the dynamic interplay of light and dark amidst floating spherical forms and bright beams of light (recalling Poe's *Eureka* and *Le souffle qui les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES* of *A Edgar Poë*) implying a bizarre spirituality unknown to Goya. An artist who submitted himself to the torments of nightmarish dreams, Goya's own *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (from *Los Caprichos*, 1799) graphically foretells the provocative juxtaposition of black and white executed by Redon. Redon's significant image [fig.3.13] follows Goya's sleep of reason and emerges from the unearthly hell with images bound in celestial redemption. The presence of evil, alive within the minds of Goya's men, makes man a monster like Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome or Poe's own dual persona of the *doppelgänger* ("William Wilson", 1839-1840). Following *Homage à Goya*, the album Redon produced the most (three times) under various different tenets is *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* [*The Temptation of Saint Anthony*] (1888). Instead of making poetic captions in the manner of Flaubert, Redon uses Flaubert's own words, relying on the poetry to evoke the image. In Flaubert, Redon found "monstres nouveaux" ["new monsters"],<sup>54</sup> monsters that stemmed from the French literary world, which began in spiritualism and doubt. As Saint Anthony undergoes a variety of temptations, from the Queen of Sheba to prophets willing to disclose their spiritual secrets, a mixture of bizarre religions and visions swirl together forming a mystical, unreal world. This new world where man is spectator envisions the French *dédoublement*. Visions dance before Anthony and he struggles to understand them; he participates with them and part of him is forever altered by them. But, in the

<sup>54</sup> Redon "Peyrelebadé, 21 Juillet 1898", p 32.

end, like the *dédoublement* or *doppelgänger*, he is only a man with a psycho-spiritual counterpart.

With the year 1890, Redon began to turn away from black and white compositions. The further development of the spiritual and mystical aspects of his work, as seen in *Les Origines* and *Homage à Goya*, becomes validated in the colour work that he begins around 1890. Redon had created works in colour prior to 1890 and throughout his career, beginning when he was student under Rodolphe Bresdin. Often his paintings were of landscapes or townscapes of his homeland, Medoc, recalling the Dutch style of painting. An early landscape study, entitled *Peyrelebadé Landscape* (c. 1868) [fig.3.14], foreshadows the dark years ahead; but, it also presents a well-developed genre painting. Redon boldly uses chiaroscuro to emphasize the ominous and foreboding sky. A brilliant sunlight illuminates a large, jagged tree, casting a deep shadow across an otherwise stark field. The low horizon line emphasizes the flatness of the land, while a small, grazing horse gives the work a presence of life that makes the threatening solitude “almost tangible”.<sup>55</sup> The landscape is a precursor to the themes of the grotesque present in the *noirs* and lithographic albums. Redon’s later colour artwork is alive with a sense of triumph; mythical figures dance and fly across his canvases and drawings. His experimentation in colour forces his style to leap beyond the pervasive melancholic imagery of his *noirs* and albums: “he abandoned the chilly purity of monochromatic light and darkness ... his work suddenly burst into paintings of full color”.<sup>56</sup> Once Redon

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<sup>55</sup> D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers, “Under a Cloud, 1840-1870”, in D.W. Druick and P.K. Zegers (eds), *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams 1840-1916*, exh. cat., The Art Institute of Chicago 1994, p 31.

<sup>56</sup> R. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1997, p 330.

worked through his art, “executed in the hours of sadness”,<sup>57</sup> his colour works embrace a more transcendent and spiritually mystical path developed through the power of colour.

Before Redon fully submitted to colour, he explored the pastel medium by re-working some of his charcoal drawings. *Old Angel* (c.1875, reworked c. 1893) [fig.3.15] exemplifies Redon’s re-working techniques, emphasizing the blending of colour with darkness and elevating the grotesque to the spiritual. Pictured in charcoal is an old angel; his long beard covers much of his chest leaving only his shoulders and arms exposed. His right arm rests on a rock ledge; his left arm props his head up. The head is bald and from his back extend two dark and beautiful Blakean wings. The powerful eyes are blank and undefined like the eyes of a marble statue. Perhaps his eyes are closed, the direction and orientation of the head, as it relaxes upon the angel’s hand, seems to be postulating that the angel is asleep. Remove the cool blue tones that blanket the angel and pictured is a dark, solitary figure confined by nothing other than space. Redon’s inclusion of the pastels, the blue in particular, surrounds the angel with colour, veiling him with a blue mist or sea. The pastel produces the sorrowful longing of the angel to be one with the Universe. He is sublimely aware (or blindly cognizant) of his presence within nature. Above his head hovers a golden light indicative of clouds with white wisps. Here, colour signifies that nature possesses an almighty power. The angel is not oppressed by it but, rather, appears uplifted and transcendent. He is one with his surroundings, regardless of the vacant expression of his eyes.

*Old Angel* represents the *old* Redon, the man who abandoned colour during the early part of his career in order to make works after his dark and perverse muse of his

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<sup>57</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 103.



imagination. Late in his life, he finds himself surrounded by a proud circle of family, friends and patrons while he also rediscovers a life embraced with spiritualism and mysticism. The works made after 1890 supposedly mark his movement away from literature. Or does it? Up until his death, Redon continually turned to ideas present in the humanities. He sought to represent the invisible, Christian God while also exploring other theological representations of Buddha or the Greek god Apollo. His work is dominated by light; his figures, where they once were beckoned to the darkness, now ride forth into the Sun. Redon's themes revolve around mythical figures that are captive, dominated or oppressed by nature or outside forces. However, the presence of melancholic sadness is all but completely gone. Like what happened with *Old Angel*, Redon re-worked the themes of his dark and melancholic life. Whereas before 1890 he was still a struggling artist, by the mid-1890s, he had firmly established himself within the contemporary French art scene, and he was finally able to create images from this secure environment.

## Conclusion A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS

Throughout Odilon Redon's career, he remained an isolated figure, whose bizarre *noirs* and albums received little critical reception outside of the nineteenth-century French (and Belgian) avant-garde. Critics like Emile Hennequin and J.-K. Huysmans advocated for Redon's expressive albums that integrated the visual worlds of the fantastic with the perverse and macabre worlds of literature. He was a stranger in an epoch of strangeness, when sensation and observation overcame formalism and academic training: "Are not the very titles and dedications of his work proof enough that he really comes from 'another' world?"<sup>1</sup> His artistic world was the result of his psycho-spiritual meditations, which he validated by creating graphic works that combined the natural (logic) with the unnatural (suggestiveness). He revolutionized the visual arts by expressing the eternal spiritual imagination with "symbolic images ... [stemming] from a personal, private language".<sup>2</sup>

Redon's integration of the real with the extraordinary emerged from his direct observation of nature, as the Symbolist Maurice Denis later extolled, "Art [is] ... the *subjective transformation* of nature".<sup>3</sup> Through the creation of the charcoal *noirs*, Redon began developing his artistic style that consisted of a deep need to probe the psychology of his mind. His second lithographic album, *A Edgar Poë*, was fundamental to his development as an artist. The album alters the motifs prevalent in the *noirs* and in the first lithographic album, *Dans le Rêve*. It also demonstrates his visualizations of the grotesque subject matter of Edgar Allan Poe. *A Edgar Poë* sees Redon offering a new

<sup>1</sup> K. Berger, *Odilon Redon: Fantasy and Colour*, trans. by M. Bullock, London 1964, p 9.

<sup>2</sup> R. Bacou, *Odilon Redon: Pastels*, trans. by B. Rehl, New York 1987, p 8.

<sup>3</sup> M. Denis, "From Gauguin and van Gogh to Neo Classicism" (1909), *Theories 1890-1910*, Paris, 1912 in C. Harrison and P. Wood (eds), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford 1999, p 50. Italics are Denis' emphasis.

sophisticated album through his abstract juxtapositions of the monochromatic tones of black and white. In particular, the addition of captions fundamentally altered his career. The poetic, *vers libre* captions combined with the series of six images introduced Redon to the literary avant-garde. Both in Paris and in Brussels, literary artists admired and promoted Redon's perverse, literary and psycho-spiritual works. *A Edgar Poë* formalized his interest in integrating text with image. He rejects the refinement of images as he relies on his abstract evocations; geometric patterns and mutilated, anthropomorphic monsters suggest a logical and imaginative visual world.

The analysis of *A Edgar Poë* orients Redon and his art within the nineteenth-century as well as suggesting his art's cross-cultural acceptance. Edgar Allan Poe's own prominence in nineteenth-century France proceeds from the relationship Charles Baudelaire thought existed between himself and Poe. Poe's 'correspondence' between the psychology of the mind with the physical actions of the body presupposes Baudelaire's interest in the connection between the spiritual and the actual. Primarily, Poe's fame first attracted Redon to the idea of using the dead poet and prose writer as a source of tribute. Dedicating *A Edgar Poë* to an American author and not a French author designates Poe as an exotic, mystical figure — a man who, before even Baudelaire — sought to understand the primordial perversity of man. In this respect, Redon's interest in Poe directly reflects other contemporary artists and writers admiration of the author. Critics like Huysmans and Hennequin expanded on Redon's homage by claiming an artistic association that related Redon's art with Poe's words. Redon's motifs and themes present in *A Edgar Poë* picture a romanticized naturalism; his work envisions the Baudelairean 'correspondence' between the imaginary and the real.

Redon's transferal of the early *noirs* to the lithographic stone continues with the creation of *A Edgar Poë*. His purpose, as with any other album, was to make an effect: "Suggestive art can furnish nothing without the sole recourse to the mysterious plays of shadows and to rhythms of lines conceived mentally".<sup>4</sup> The album, unnumbered, was similar to a literary experience. The images picture Redon's interests in expressing the fantastic. While also, *A Edgar Poë* furthers his ideas regarding progression, *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*; the primitive, *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI*; and the importance of a spiritual or mystical presence within art and the world, *Le souffle qui les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES*. The album is a succession of ambiguous, logical lithographs poeticized with Poe-esque captions. It quietly evokes the mysteriously disastrous and perverse events of Poe, without lucidly defining the evil and sinister attributes of Poe. The six plates freely integrate Redon's visions with Poe's writings thereby merging the realm of the imagination with the realm of nature.

Following the publication of *A Edgar Poë*, Redon was labeled as being a 'literary artist'. He continually struggled to break free from being associated with the American author. Critics like Hennequin and Huysmans associated Redon with Poe because of their apparent similarity. While Redon disassociated himself from Poe, an effort has been made to examine their resemblance in accordance with Redon's own writings upon the subject as well as the select number of charcoal drawings that exists as exemplary of his interest in Poe's writings. However, Redon's blatant denial of Poe's influence, as a rebuttal to being labeled a 'literary artist', orients him amidst the changing historical

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<sup>4</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 21.

environment of the *fin-de-siècle*. *A soi-même*, the journal published posthumously, disputes his supposed 'dependence' on literature through his discussion of the logic behind making 'literary art'. Redon is neither dependent on literature, nor is he solely a 'literary' artist. However, it his art, which is both literary and illustrative, that promotes him as a pioneer in the Symbolist movement and which generated a sincere following amidst the Belgian avant-garde, *Les Vingt*.

*The truth is that one can say nothing about oneself.*  
- Odilon Redon<sup>5</sup>

The album *A Edgar Poë* suggests Redon's interest in creating artwork that promoted his early *noirs* while, at the same time, examining new motifs. The album fundamentally altered his career. In a letter to Mellerio, Redon describes the work as being "précis dans l'exécution, et presque sec" [precise in it's execution, and almost dry];<sup>6</sup> as if denigrating the album further removes himself and his art from being associated with Poe. *A Edgar Poë* focuses on the development of Redon's iconographic symbols while, also, introducing the literary dimension to his art. He utilized Poe's fame as a way of promoting his own art. The Poe-tic captions beneath the suggestive black and white compositions introduce a new symbolic language in the visual arts. The developmental album *A Edgar Poë* merged literature with art, thereby creating a new 'correspondence' between artists and writers. His subjective, evocative works proclaimed a new symbolic art based in realism, naturalism, impressions and expressions. In conclusion, this thesis argues that *A Edgar Poë* introduced Redon's visual and literary art to the French and Belgium nineteenth-century avant-garde. It contends that Redon

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<sup>5</sup> Redon, *To Myself*, p 97.

<sup>6</sup> O. Redon, "Peyrelebadé, 21 Juillet 1898", in Van Oest (ed.), *Lettres d'Odilon Redon*, Paris and Bruxelles 1923, p 31.

explores and exploits the artistic and spiritual relationship thought to exist between himself and Poe. Finally, the thesis shows how the Symbolist artists in Belgium admired Redon's ability to make art based on perverse, macabre literature.



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Unless otherwise indicated, all illustrations are the work of Odilon Redon.

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- 2.17 Plate 6: *LA FOLIE* [*MADNESS*], A Edgar Poë, 14.5 x 20.0cm, The Art Institute of Chicago.

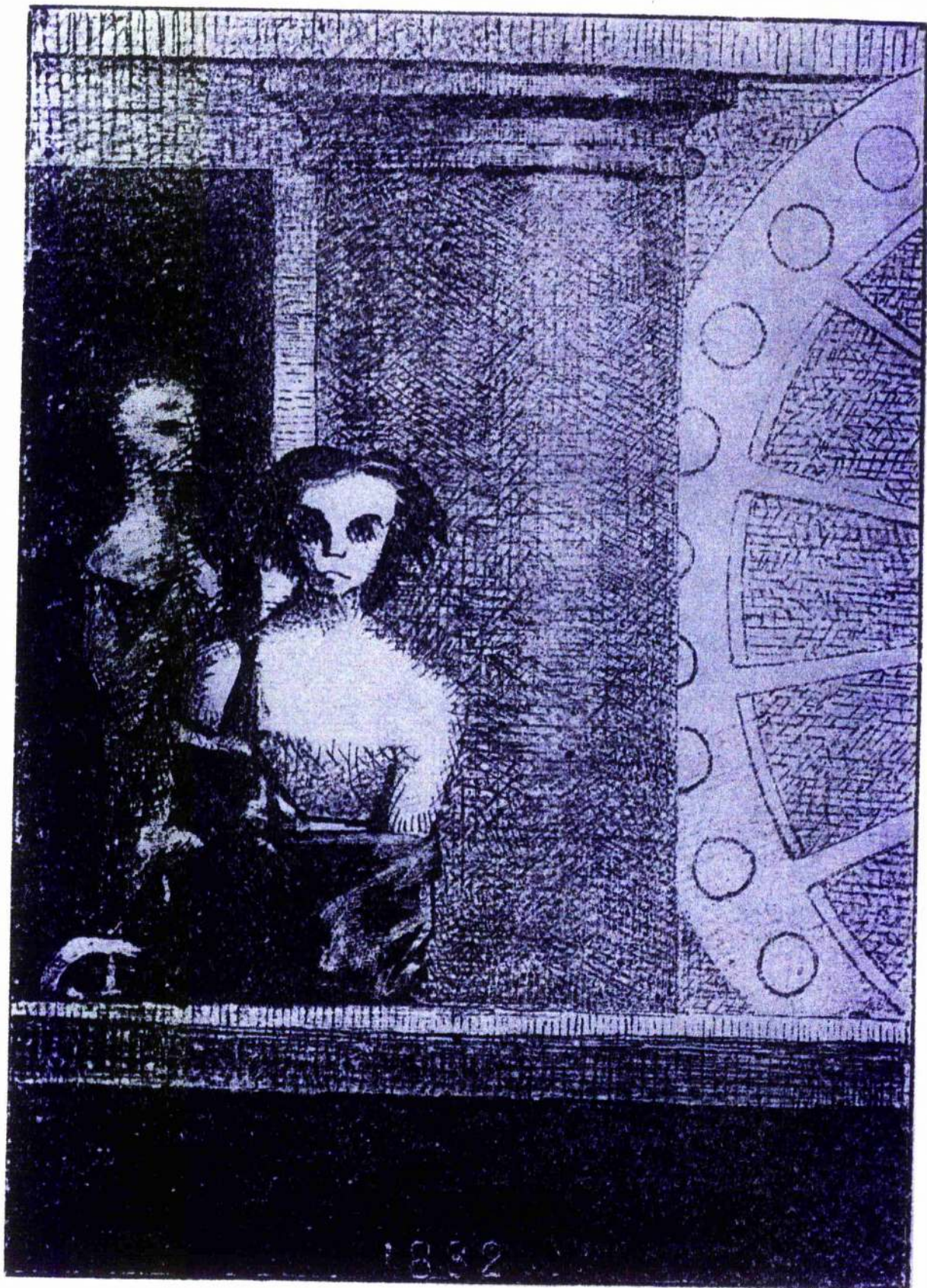
### Chapter 3 OUT OF DARKNESS

- 3.1 *Dans le Rêve* [*In Dreams*], 1879, Album with cover frontispiece and eight plates, Lithographs, The Art Institute of Chicago.
- 3.1a Plate 1: Frontispiece, 30.2 x 22.3cm.
- 3.1b Plate 2: *Eclosion* [*Blossoming*], 33.4 x 25.9cm.
- 3.1c Plate 3: *Germination* [*Germination*], 27.3 x 19.5cm.
- 3.1d Plate 4: *La Roue* [*The Wheel*], 23.3 x 19.9cm.
- 3.1e Plate 5: *Limbes* [*Limbo*], 30.7 x 22.3cm.
- 3.1f Plate 6: *Le Joueur* [*The Gambler*], 27.3 x 19.3cm.
- 3.1g Plate 7: *Gnome* [*Gnome*], 27.5 x 22.3cm.
- 3.1h Plate 8: *Félinerie* [*Feline Scene*] or *Méphisto* [*Mephisto*], 27.1 x 20.4cm.
- 3.1i Plate 9: *Vision* [*Vision*], 27.6 x 19.9cm.
- 3.1j Plate 10: *Triste montée* [*Sad Ascent*], 27 x 20cm.
- 3.1k Plate 11: *Sur la coupe* [*On the dish*], 24.4 x 16.3cm.
- 3.2 *The Tell-Tale Heart*, 1883, Charcoal, 40.2 x 33.3cm, Santa Barbara Museum of Art.
- 3.3 *The Cask of Amontillado*, 1883, Charcoal, 36.2 x 31.4cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
- 3.4 *The Teeth*, 1883, Charcoal and black chalk, 51.2 x 36.6cm, The Woodner Family Collection, New York.
- 3.5 *The Raven*, 1882, Charcoal, 39.9 x 27.9cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
- 3.6 Cover for Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque* [*Contes Grotesques*], trans. Emile Hennequin, 1882, Lithograph, 16.2 x 10.6cm, Collection of Richard Hobbs.
- 3.7 'L'Idole' [*The Idol*], frontispiece to Emile Verhaeren's *Le Soirs* [*Evenings*], 1887, Lithograph, 16.2 x 9.4cm, British Museum, London.
- 3.8 Frontispiece to Iwan Gilkin's *La Damnation de l'artiste* [*Damnation of the Artist*], 1890, Lithograph, 19 x 12.5cm, British Museum, London.

- 3.9 Frontispiece to Iwan Gilkin's *Ténèbras* [*Darkness*], 1892, Lithograph, 19.8 x 12.3cm, British Museum, London.
- 3.10 *Elle se montre à lui, dramatique et grandiose avec sa chevelure de prêtresse druidique* [*She shows herself to him, dramatic and grandiose, with her hair like that of a Druid priestess*], *Le Juré* [*The Juror*], 1887, for the play written by Edmond Picard, 19.2 x 14.3cm, British Museum, London.
- 3.11 *Un homme du peuple, un sauvage, a passé sous la tête de chevaux* [*A man of the people, a savage, passed beneath the head of the horses*], *Le Juré* [*The Juror*], 1887, for the play written by Edmond Picard, 18.3 x 13.6cm, British Museum, London.
- 3.12 Plate 8: *Et l'homme parut, interrogeant le sol d'où il sort et qui l'attire, il se fraya la voie vers de sombres clartés* [*And man appeared; questioning the earth from which he emerged and which attracts him, he made his way toward the somber brightness*], From *Les Origins* [*Origins*], 1883, Lithograph, 28.0 x 20.4cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
- 3.13 Plate 3: *Un fous dans un morne paysage* [*A madman in a dismal landscape*], From *Homage à Goya* [*Homage to Goya*], 1885, Lithograph, 22.6 x 19.3cm, British Museum, London.
- 3.14 *Peyrelebadé Landscape*, c. 1868, Oil on canvas, 22 x 41 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
- 3.15 *Old Angel*, c. 1875, reworked c. 1893, Pastel and charcoal, 51 x 36cm, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.

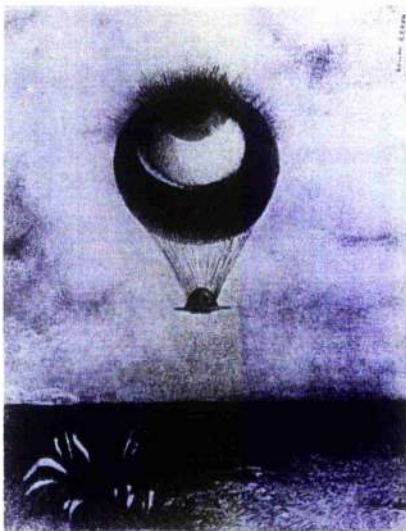
## ILLUSTRATIONS





1.1a Introductory Picture, *A Edgar Poë*

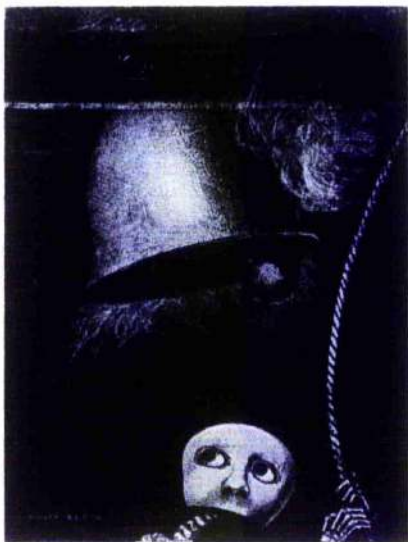




*1.1b Plate 1: L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI.*



*1.1c Plate 3: Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenór apparaît.*



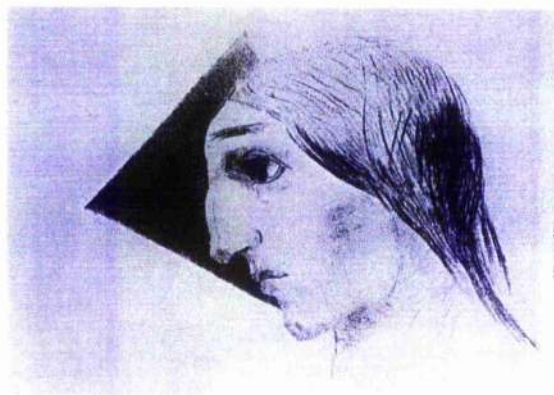
*1.1d Plate 3: Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE.*



*1.1e Plate 4: A l'horizon, l'ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard interrogateur.*

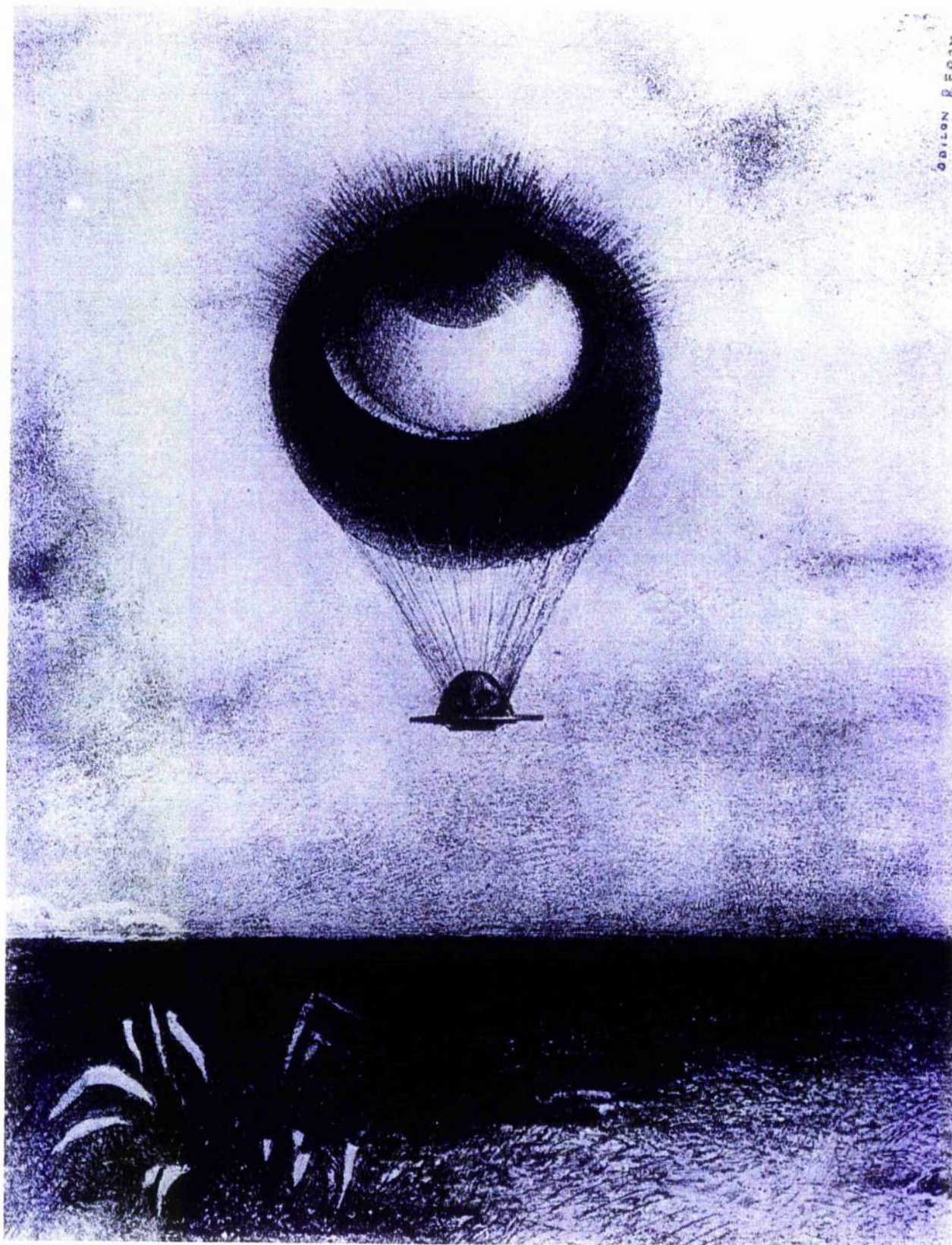


*1.1f Plate 5: Le souffle qui les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES.*



*1.1g Plate 6: LA FOLIE.*

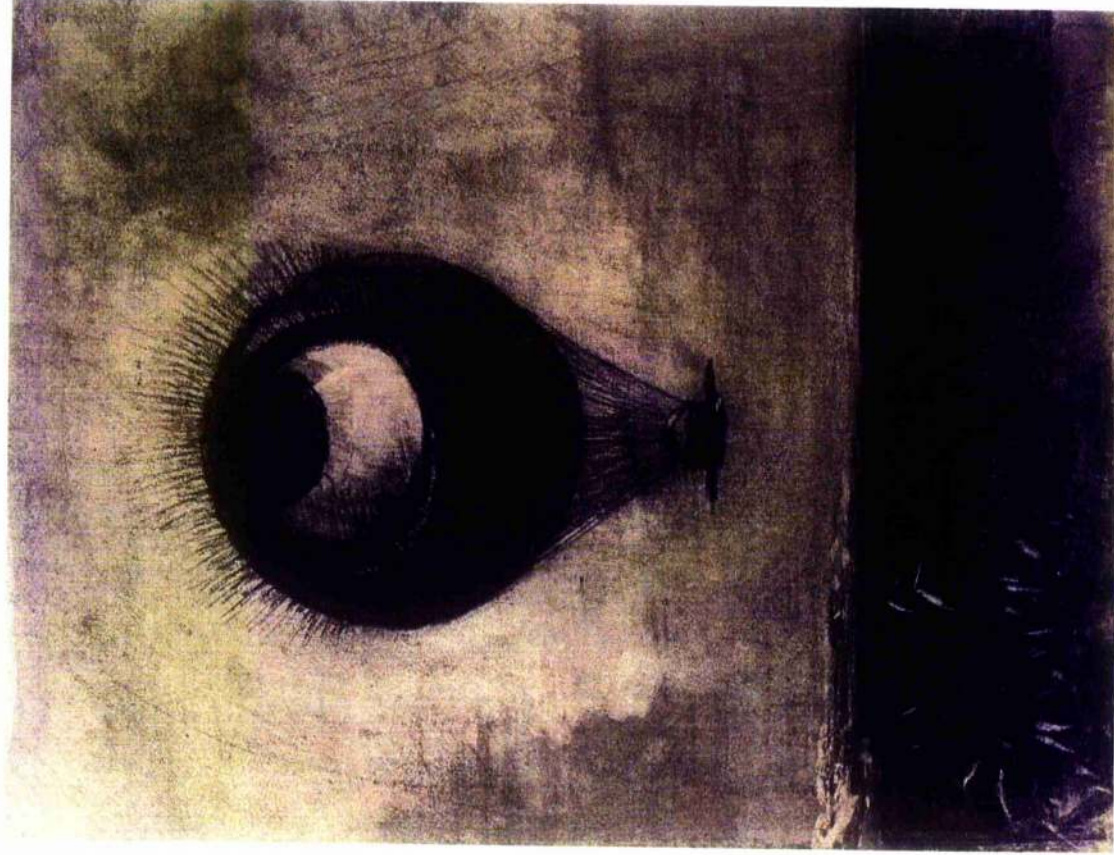




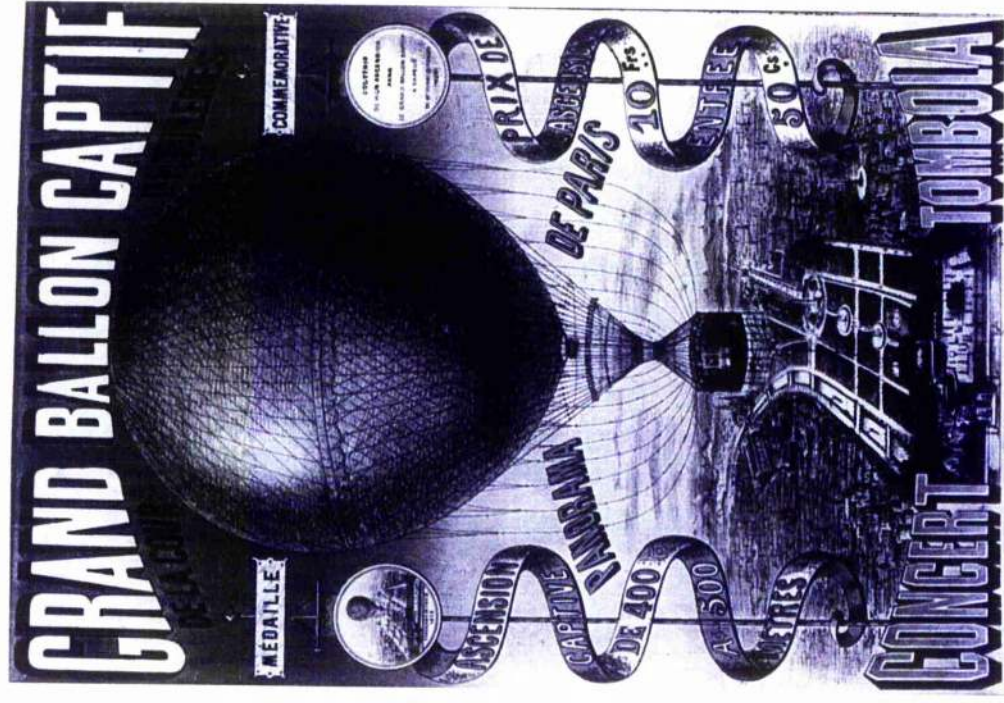
2.1 *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI.*

*The eye like a strange balloon moves towards INFINITY.*



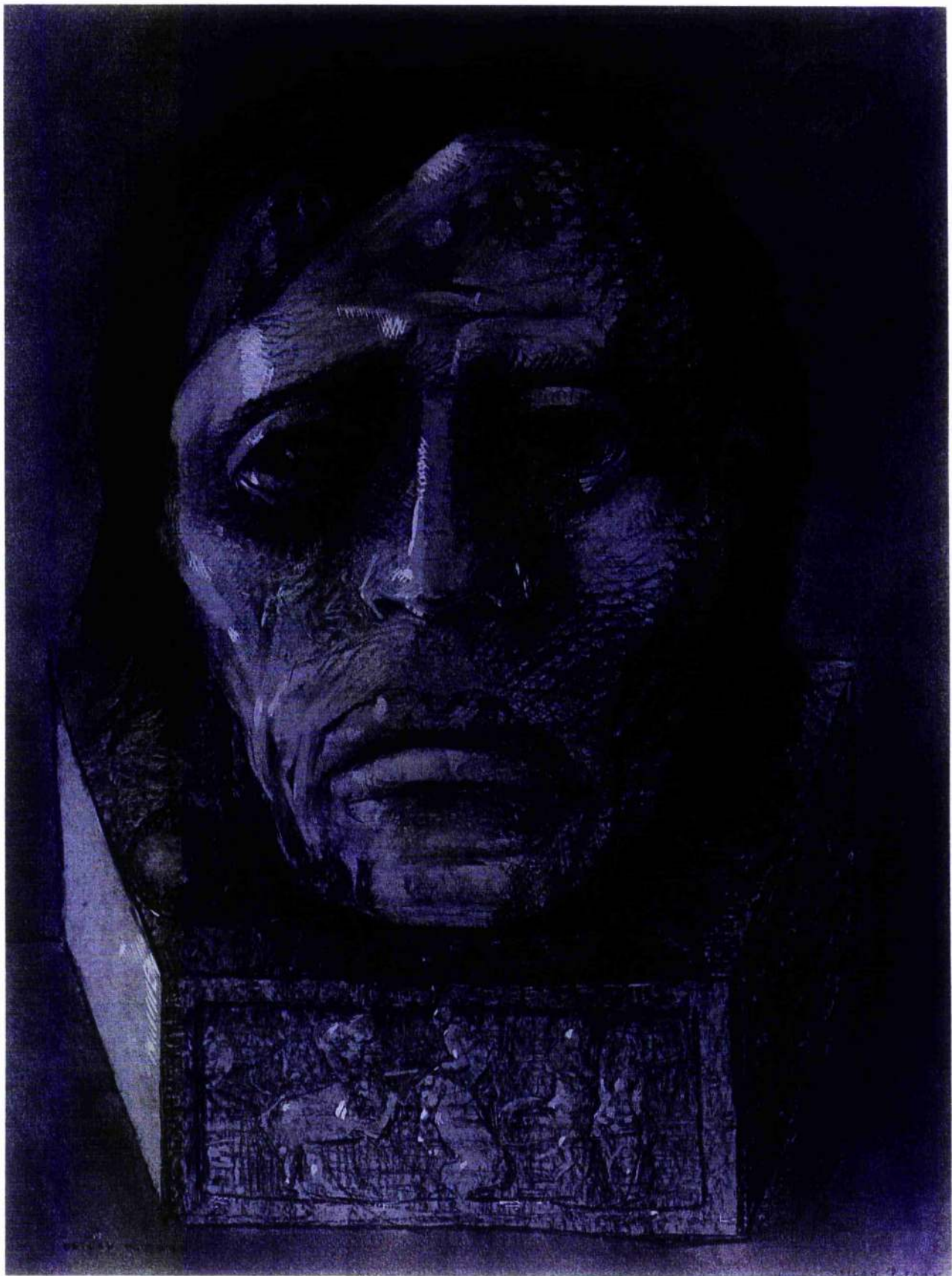


2.2 Eye-Balloon, 1878. Charcoal; 42.2 x 33.2cm.



2.3 Anonymous. Grand Balloon captif, 1878.  
Color lithograph.





2.4 *After the Execution*, 1877. Charcoal and gouache; 45 x 32.5cm

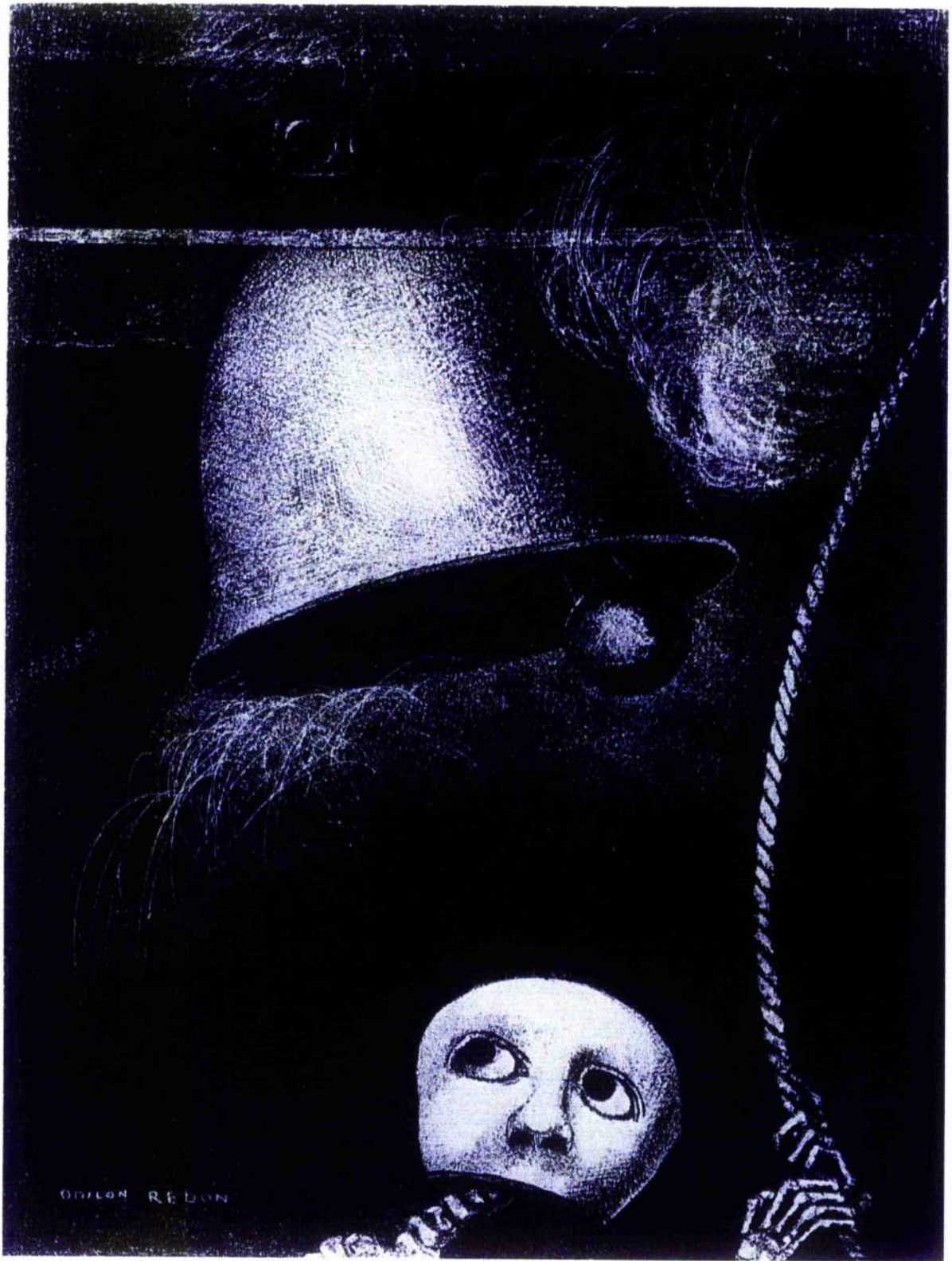


2.5 *Devant le noir Soleil de la MELANCOLIE, Lenór apparaît.*  
*Before the black Sun of MELANCHOLY, Lenore appears.*





2.6 *Lenore*, 1882. Charcoal and black chalk; 50 x 35.5cm.



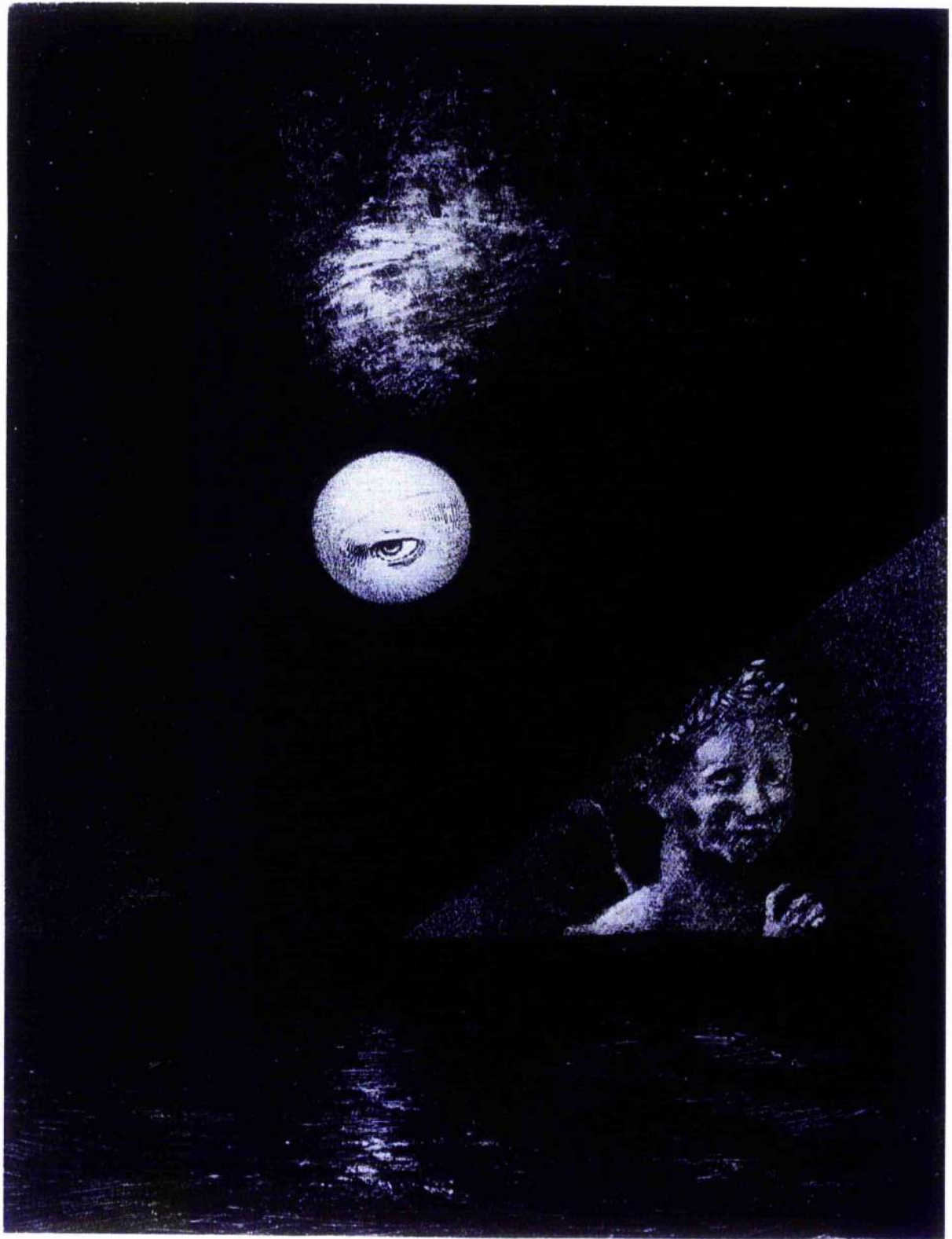
2.7 *Un Masque sonne le GLAS FUNÉBRE.*

*A Mask rings the FUNERAL KNELL.*





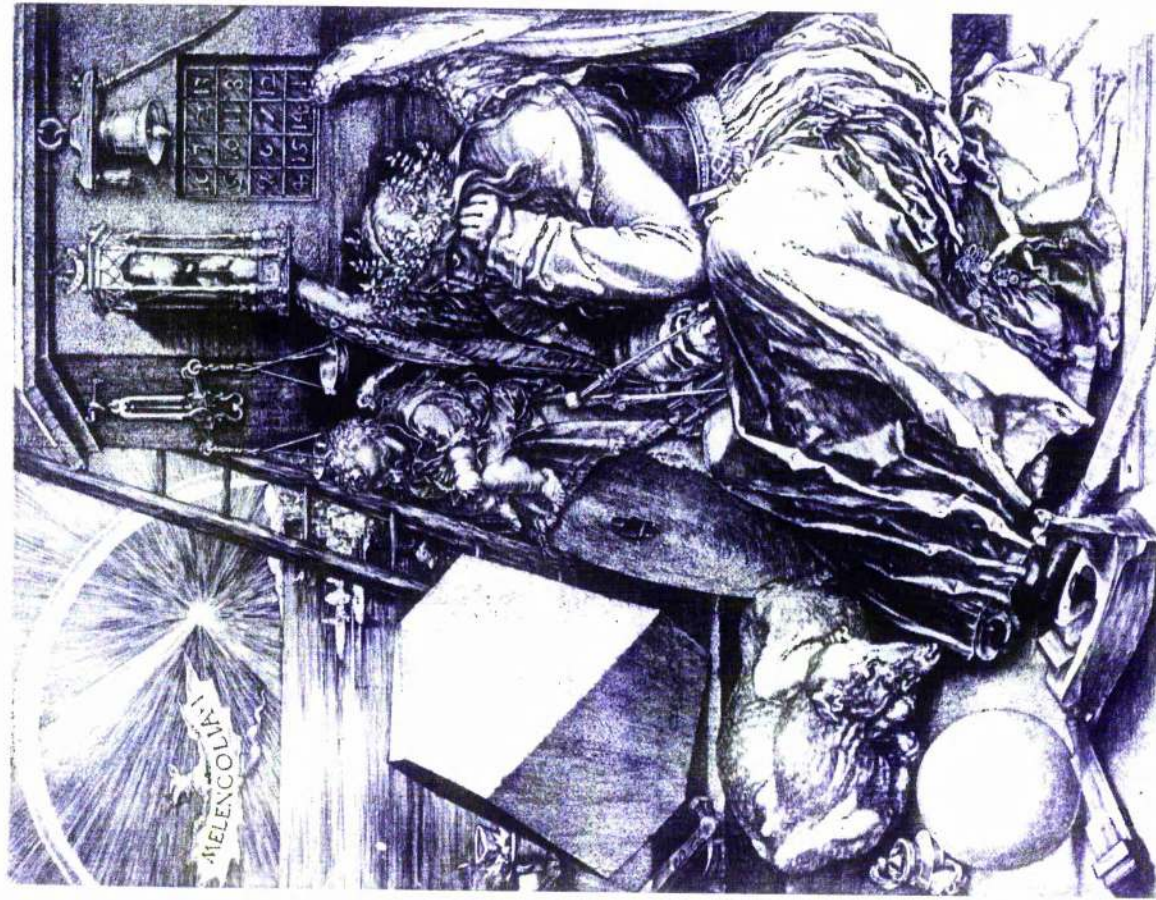
2.8 *The Masque of the Red Death*, 1883. Charcoal and black chalk; 43.7 x 35.8cm.



2.9 *A l'horizon, l'ange des CERTITUDES, et dans le ciel sombre un regard interrogateur.*

*On the horizon, the angel of CERTITUDE, and in the sombre heaven a questioning eye.*



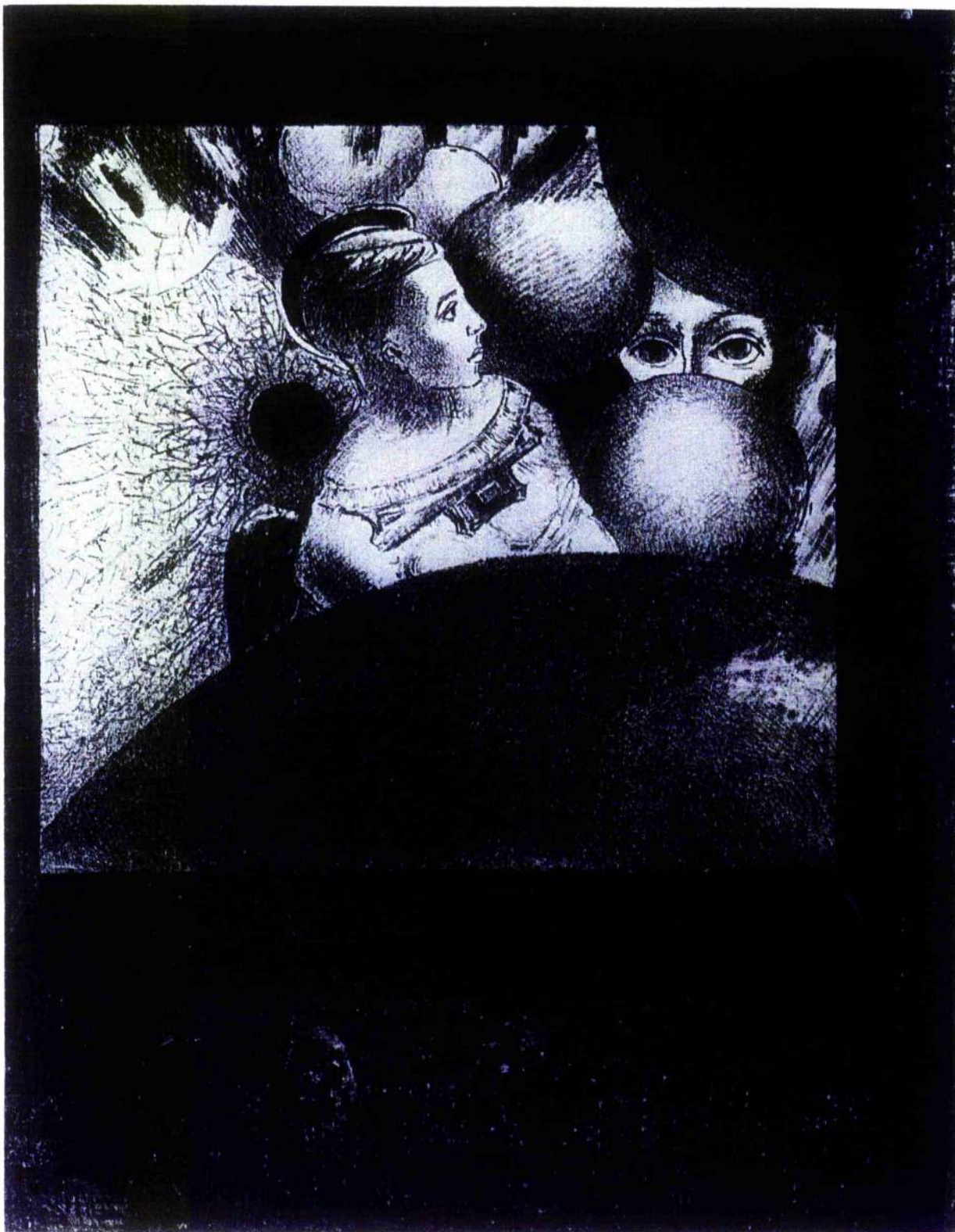


2.10 Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514, Engraving.



2.11 *Silence* (Edgar Poe), c. 1868. Graphite; 27.3 x 24.5cm.

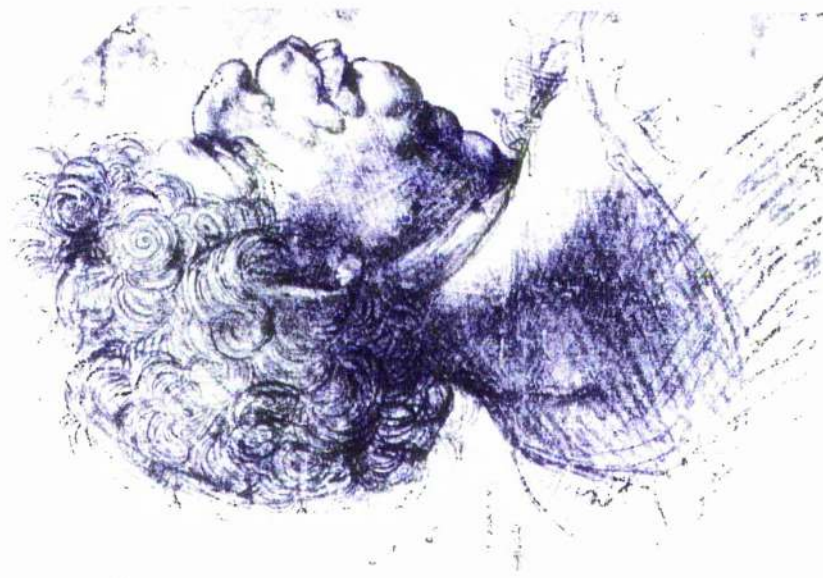




2.12 *Le souffle qui conduit les êtres est aussi dans les SPHERES.*

*The breath which leads the living creatures is also in the SPHERES.*



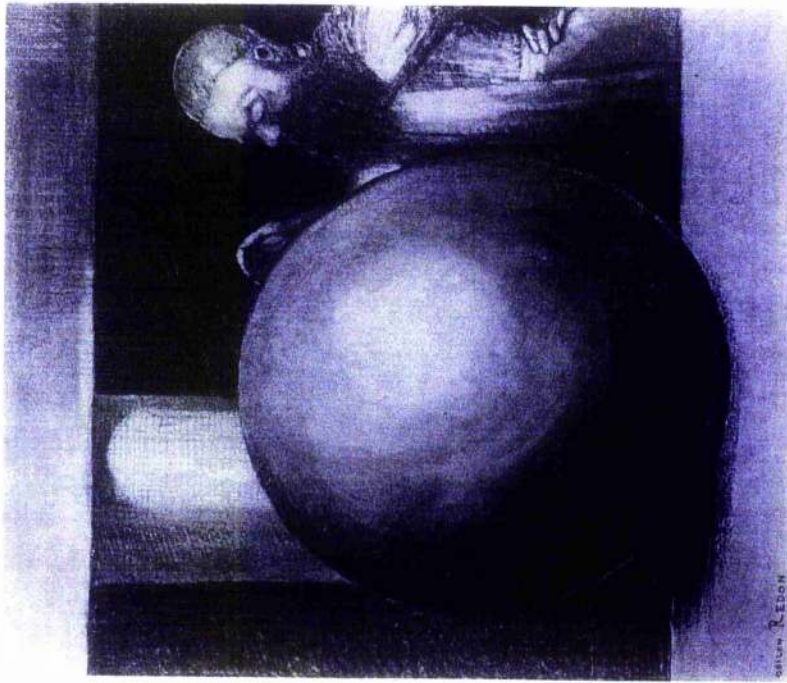


2.13 Leonardo da Vinci, *Grotesque head in profile to the right*, 1503-1504. Charcoal, retouched to a certain extent by another hand; 39 x 28cm.

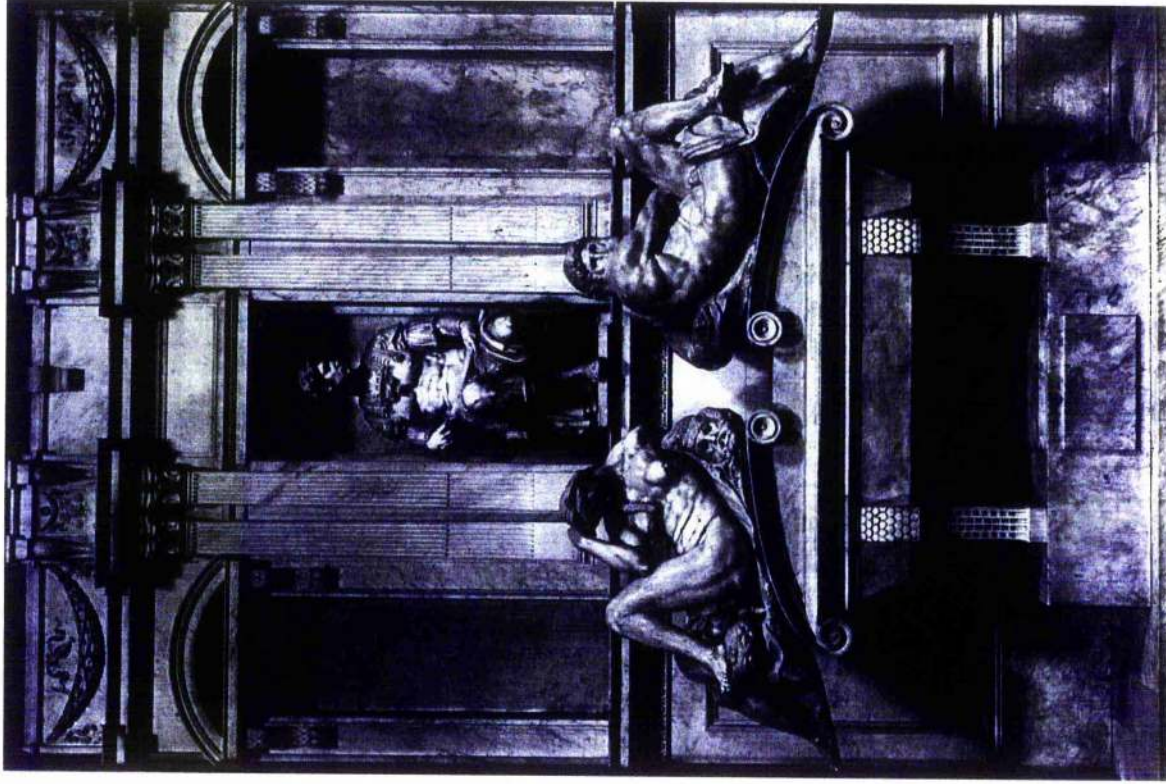


2.14a Leonardo da Vinci, *Half-length caricature of an old man with a prominent chin*, c. 1500 (?). Red Chalk; 18 x 0cm.

2.14b Leonardo da Vinci, *Profile of a bald man to the left*, c. 1500 (?). Red Chalk; 18 x 10cm.

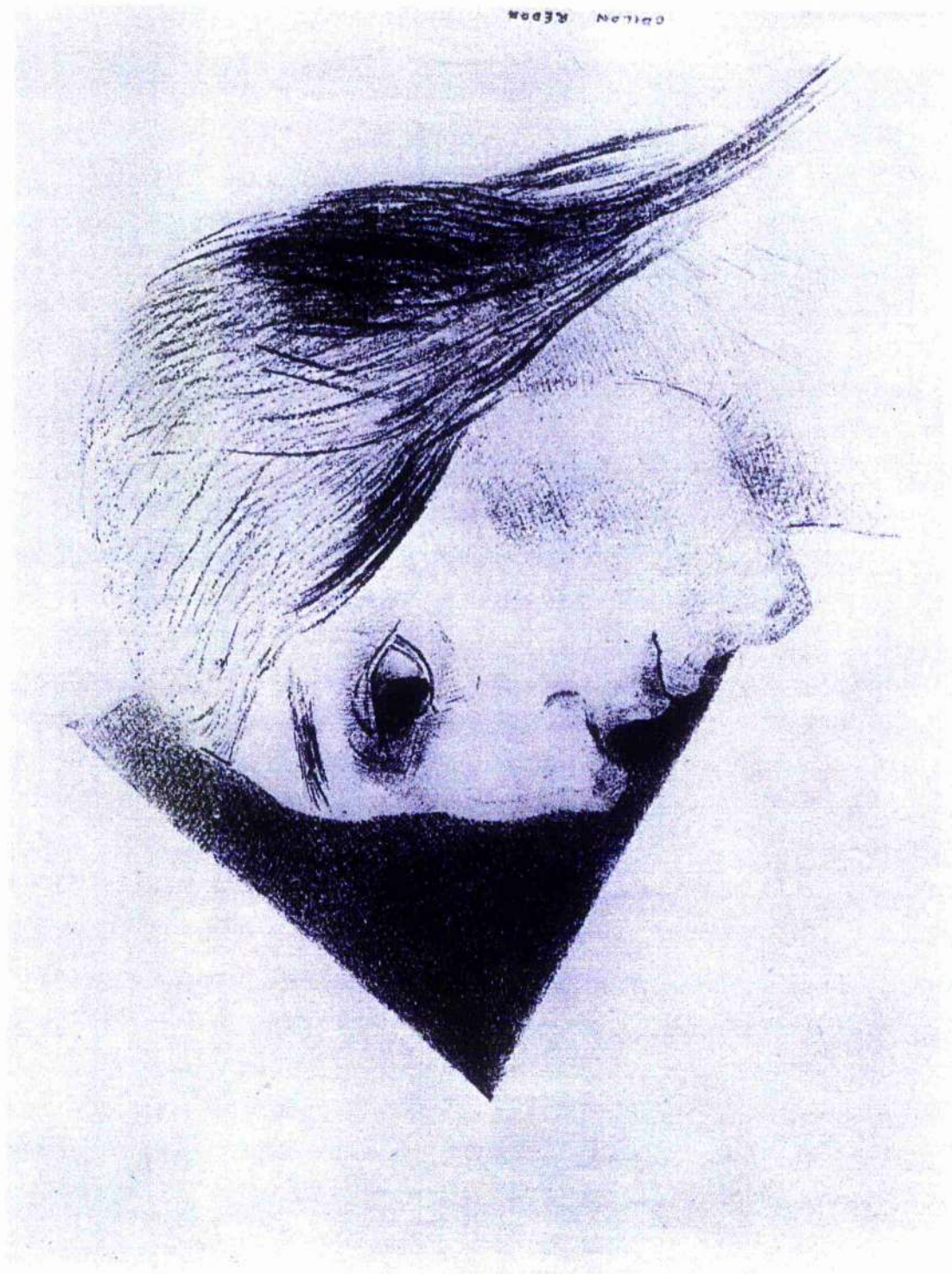


2.15 *The Metal Ball*, 1878. Charcoal; 41 x 36cm.



2.16 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Night and Day* tomb of Giuliano de' Medici, New Sacristy (Medici Chapel), San Lorenzo Florence, Italy, 1519-1534. Marble, central figure approx. 5'11" high.

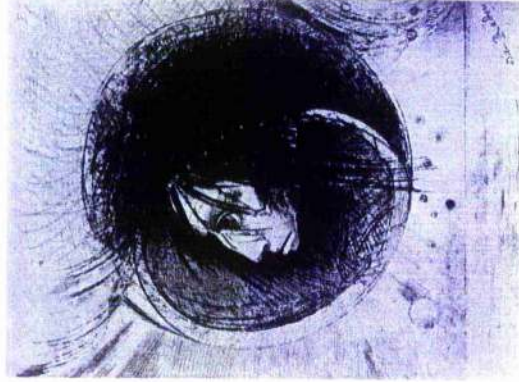




2.17 LA FOLIE.  
MADNESS.



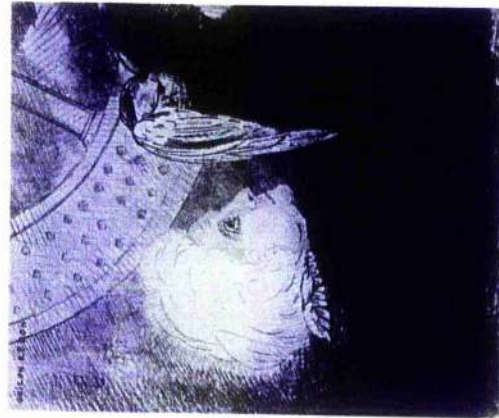
3.1a Plate 1: Frontispiece



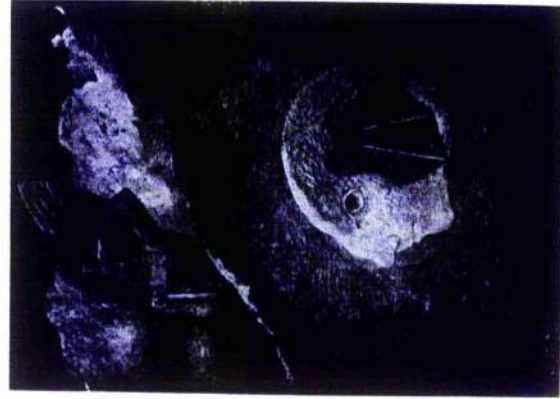
3.1b Plate 2: *Ecllosion*.



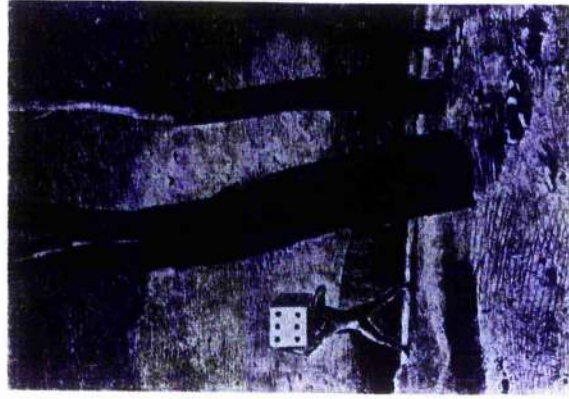
3.1c Plate 3: *Germination*



3.1d Plate 4: *La Roue*



3.1e Plate 5: *Limbes*



3.1f Plate 6: *Le Joueur*

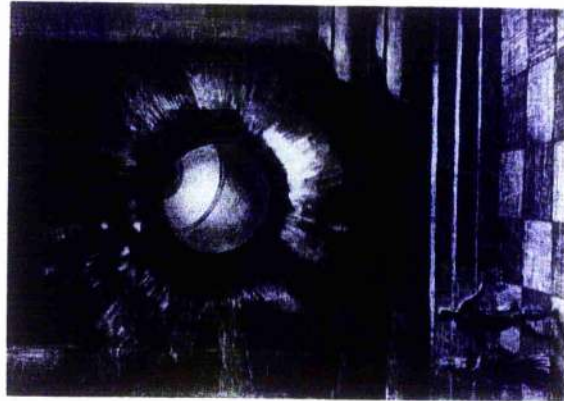




3.1g Plate 7: *Gnome*



3.1h Plate 8: *Félinerie*



3.1i Plate 9: *Vision*



3.1j Plate 10: *Triste montée*



3.1k Plate 11: *Sur la coupe*

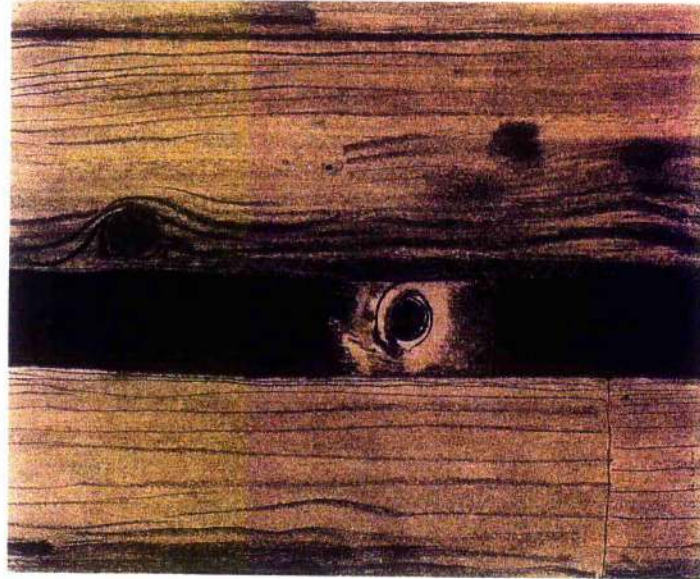




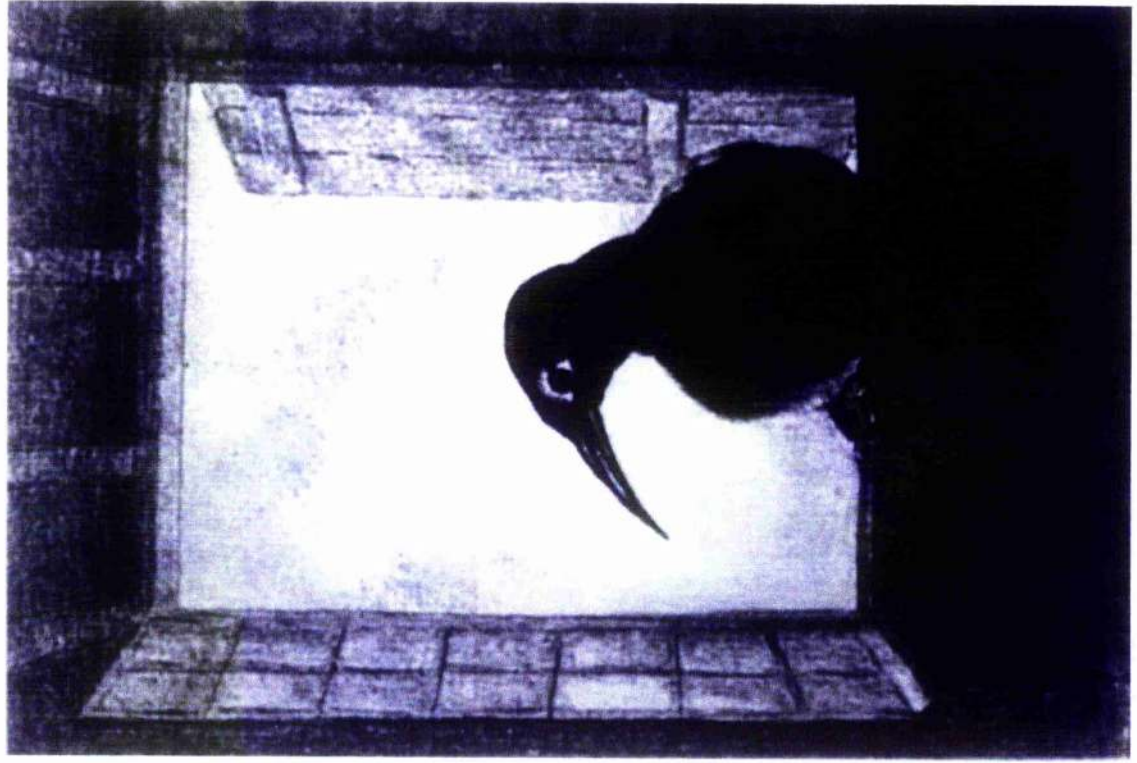
3.4 *The Teeth*, 1883.  
Charcoal and black chalk;  
51.2 x 36.6cm.



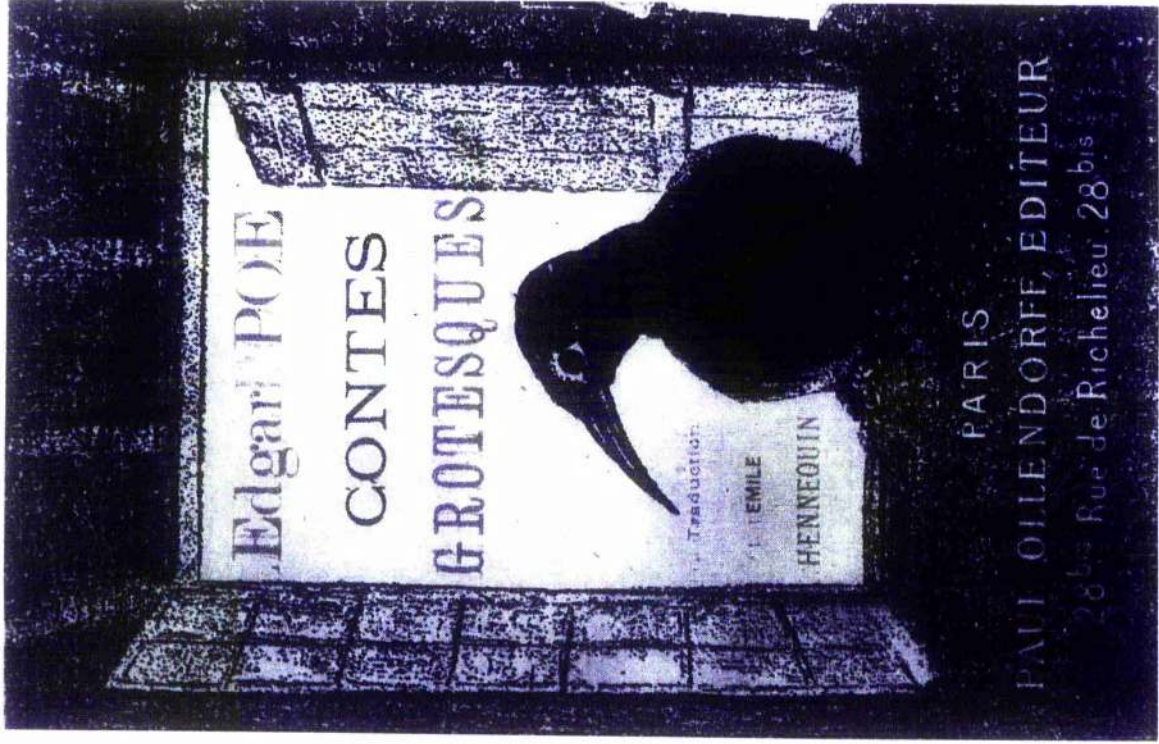
3.3 *The Cask of Amontillado*, 1883.  
Charcoal; 36.2 x 31.4cm.



3.2 *The Tell-Tale Heart*, 1883.  
Charcoal; 40.2 x 33.3cm.

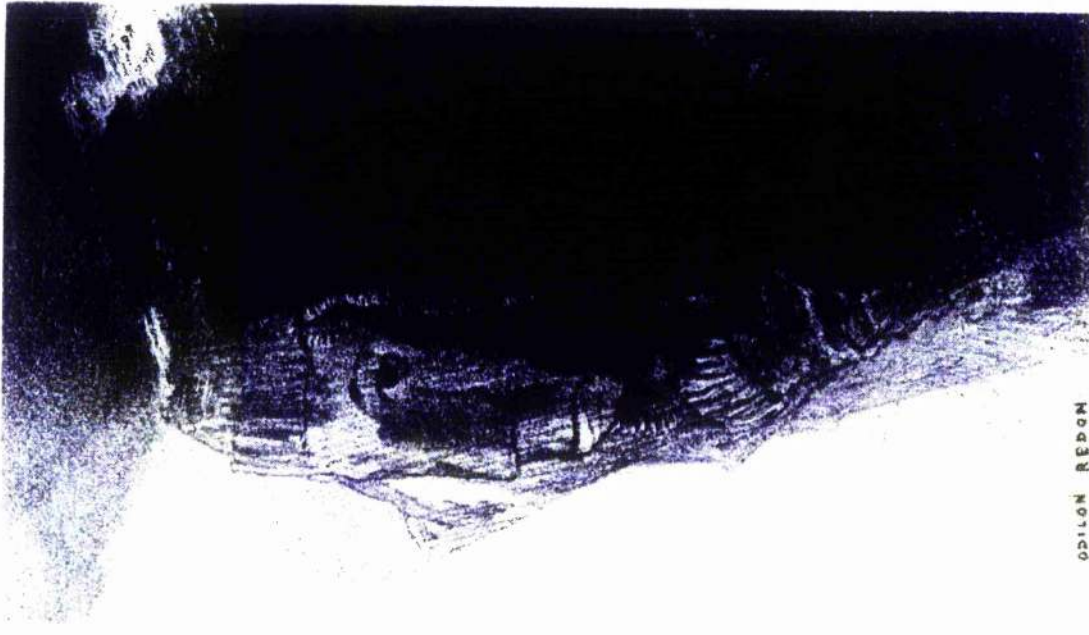


3.5 *The Raven*, 1882. Charcoal; 39.9 x 27.9cm.

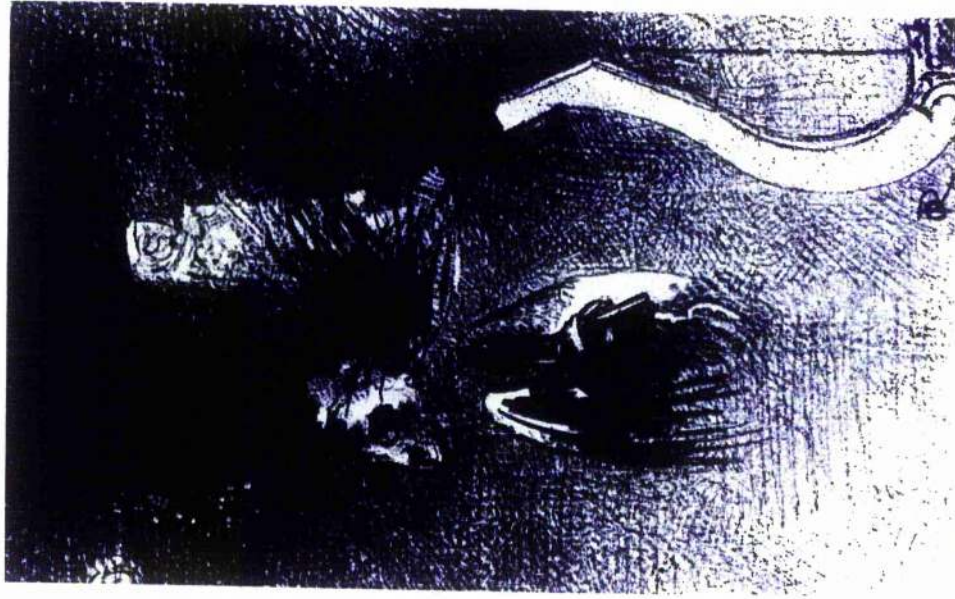


3.6 Cover for Edgar Allan Poe, *Contes Grotesques*, translated by Emile Hennequin, 1882.

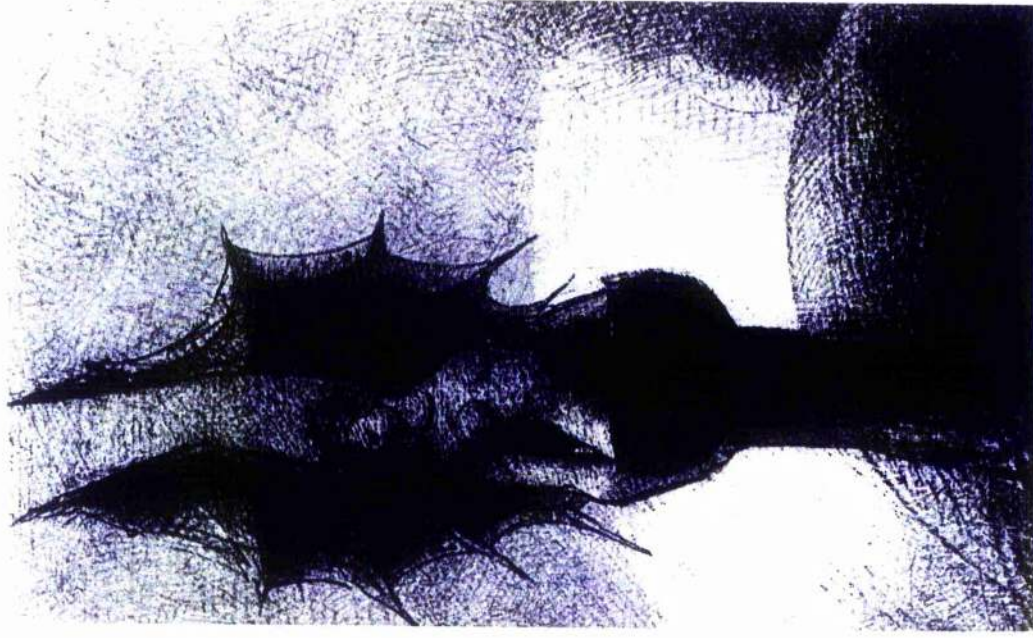




3.7 'L'Idole', frontispiece to Emile Verhaeren's *Le Soirs*, 1887. Lithograph; 16.2 x 9.4cm.

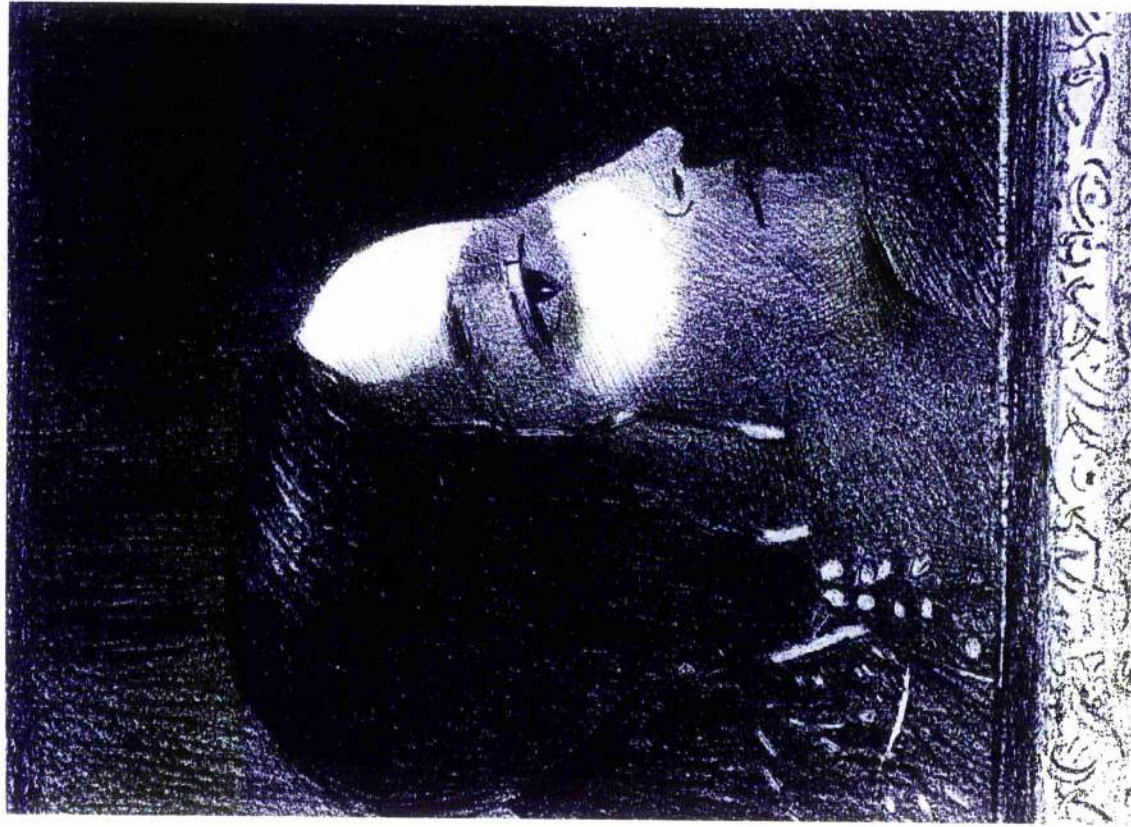


3.8 Frontispiece to Iwan Gilkin's *La Damnation de l'artiste*, 1890. Lithograph; 19 x 12.5cm.



3.9 Frontispiece to Iwan Gilkin's *Ténèbres*, 1892. Lithograph; 19.8 x 12.3cm.



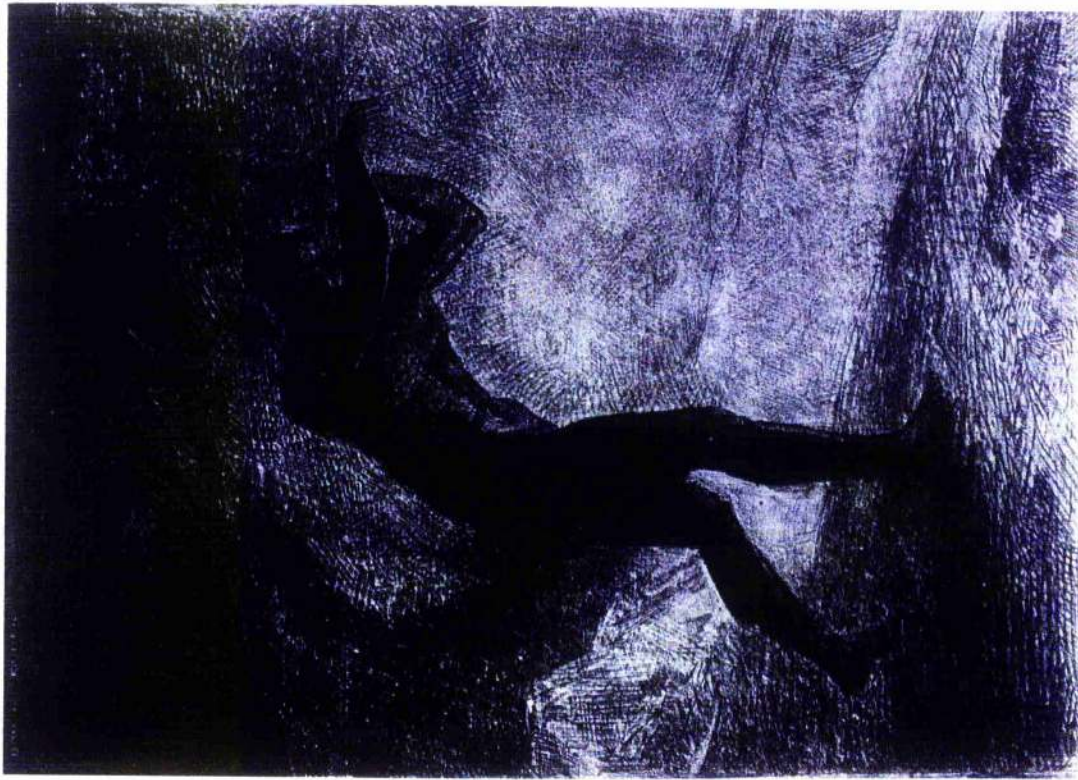


3.10 Elle se montre à lui, dramatique et grandiose avec sa chevelure de prêtresse druidique, *Le Juré*, Play by Edmond Picard; 180 x 151mm.

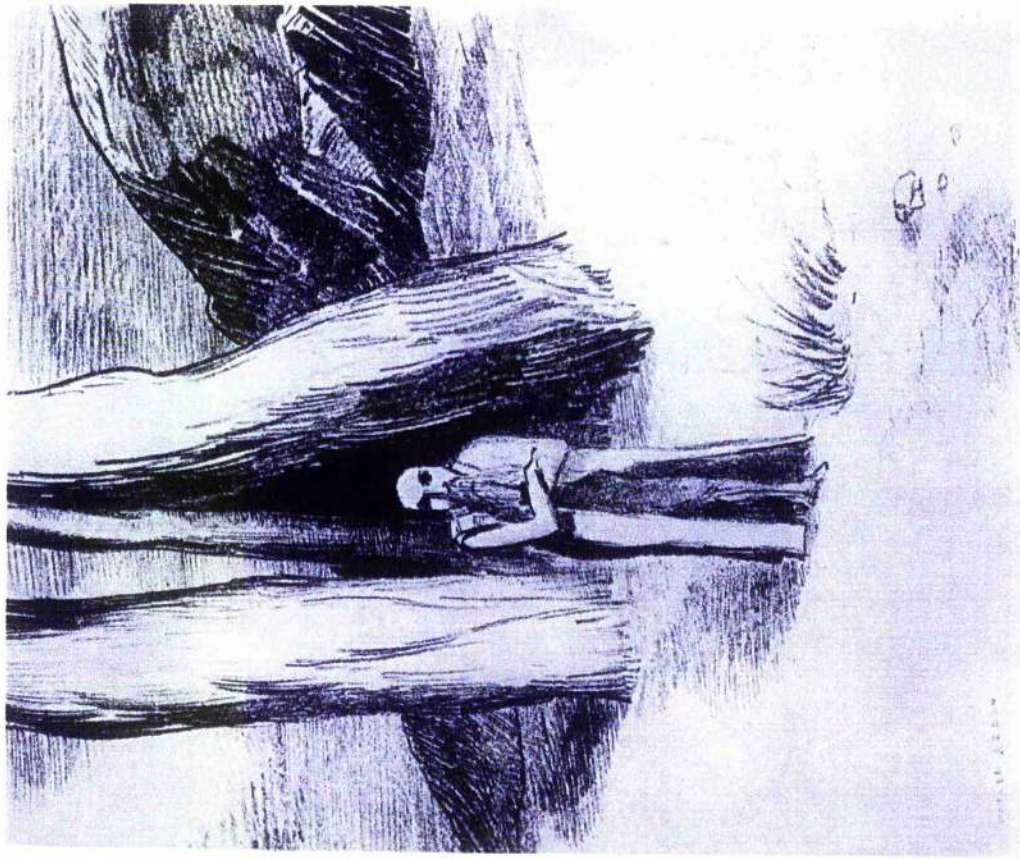


3.11 Un homme du peuple, un sauvage, a passé sous la tête de chevaux, *Le Juré*, Play by Edmond Picard; 183 x 136mm.





3.12 Plate 8: *Et l'homme parut, interrogeant le sol d'où il sort et qui l'attire il se fraya la voie vers de sombres clartés*. From *Les Origins*, 1883. Lithograph; 280 x 204mm.

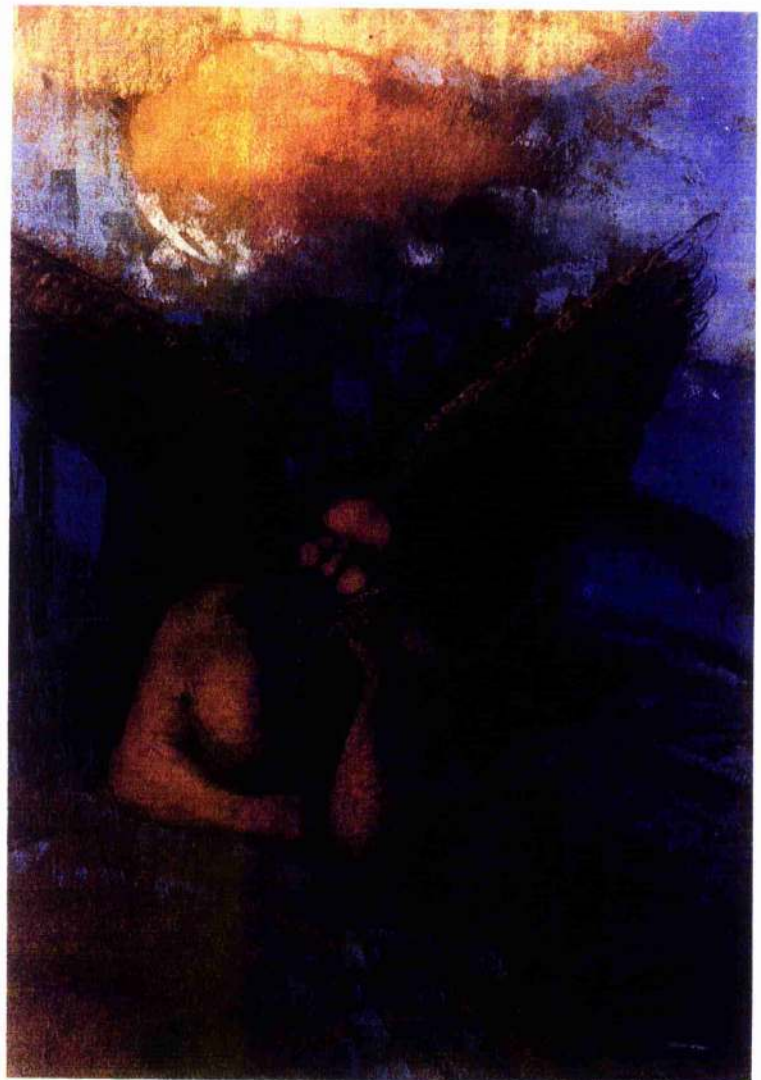


3.13 Plate 3: *Un fous dans un morne paysage*. From *Homage à Goya*, 1885. Lithograph; 22.6 x 19.3cm.





3.14 *Peyrelebade Landscape*,  
c. 1868. Oil on canvas;  
22 x 41cm.



3.15 *Old Angel*, c. 1875, reworked  
c. 1893. Pastel and charcoal;  
51 x 36cm.